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THE MIAMI CONNECTION

The New **MIKE SHAYNE**
Short Novel
by **BRETT HALLIDAY**

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JANUARY 331



MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

JANUARY, 1978
VOL. 42, NO. 1

NEW COMPLETE MIKE SHAYNE
SHORT NOVEL

THE MIAMI CONNECTION

By BRETT HALLIDAY

Before Shayne's prospective client could explain his problem he was felled by a rifle bullet through the center of his forehead. But before the redhead detective could even get started back for Miami, he found himself in the middle of as dangerous, deadly and lucrative a case as any in his long and violent career 2 to 53

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THE MIAMI CONNECTION

THE NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

Shayne's first problem after prospective client Gerald Romig is shot dead at his side on a Florida beach is to find out why Romig wanted to hire him. His second problem is to stay alive until he can dig out the motive lurking behind Romig's murder.

by BRETT HALLIDAY

SHE WAS A BEAUTY. From his vantage in the thick virgin palmetto swatch, the killer held the girl in the telescopic sight and allowed himself a few more seconds of visual pleasure. She was almost six feet tall, he estimated, with clean lines and a healthy tousled look. Sun-streaked dark hair wafted in the wind blowing in from the Atlantic cove.

She was conversing. The killer could see the movement of her unpainted lips. He eased the silencer snout slightly to

the left and focussed on her companion. The man looked three times the girl's age, also tall and narrow. But where the girl was straight of spine and classic in thrust of braless breasts, the man had allowed his body to curve with the years.

Bony shoulders were turned in, resulting in the impression that his chest had become concave. There was a tough-leather look about him, skin sun-darkened until almost black—where the girl was a velvety

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honey-brown—the outlines of long strands of muscles and veins prominent. Black hair under a faded denim hat was chopped off short across the man's brow but hung long down the back of his neck.

The killer sighed and played a little game with the man and the girl as they continued to talk. He moved the sight from man to girl, back to man, then to girl . . .

Pfff! Pfff!

That's all it would take—two slight squeezes of his trigger finger and they would be wasted.

The sadism in the killer mounted. He wished they could see him. He felt an almost overwhelming desire to watch their faces change as the reality of impending death swept over them.

He smiled slightly and continued to play the game. The rifle danced, taking on a rhythm. Man to girl, girl to man . . .

The man lifted his right hand, swept off the denim hat, slapped it against his thigh and clomped the hat back on his head. He tensed, dug in a little deeper with his propped elbow, tightened the rifle butt against his shoulder, settled on his target, focused and began the squeeze.

The sound of the single shot

was soft in the brilliant Florida morning . . .

II

MIKE SHAYNE'S SIGHT-TO-MIND communication system clicked with near-computer rapidity—recording and storing automatically without total comprehension—in the instant of Gerald Romig's death.

He and Romig had been walking the beach in the hot sunshine. It was Romig's choosing. Romig had wanted guaranteed audio privacy. Inside the richly-appointed condominium unit, Romig had tucked a folded thousand-dollar bill into Shayne's shirt pocket.

"Most guys I know want bread up front. That's for you to listen, Shayne. You buy the package, it's like I told you on the phone. Another thou now, then your daily rate plus expenses, guaranteed pay. You don't buy"—Romig shrugged fat shoulders—"I'm out a thou. Let's go to the beach. I wanna walk. I always walk about now. Be back here by eleven. That's when I brunch. But the important thing is, Shayne—the wind doesn't have ears. Some walls do."

So they were walking. And then there had been that odd little sound off somewhere in the distance and, abruptly,

Romig's forehead had split like a ripe watermelon.

Shayne launched himself off to the right, diving away from the pitching fat man. He hit the sand hard, chest down, rolled, lost his hat, came up on his elbows with the .45 snaked from his shoulder rig and aimed with both hands. The only trouble was, he did not have a target.

He flattened himself, sucked tiny grains of sand into his nostrils and waited. He felt terribly exposed. But there was no second shot. None was necessary. The sniper had been dead center with the first.

Shayne lifted and twisted his head. Romig was about four yards down toward the rolling water, flat on his face, arms and legs spread, flowered beach jacket flapping. Fat thighs protruded from matching shorts. One foot remained moccasined, toes dug into the pale sand. Romig had been shot out of the other moccasin.

Now the Miami private detective's sight-to-mind communication system began to click, this time in recall. He and Romig had been approaching the south line of the condominium beach area, were approximately ten yards from private property. Far down the beach, a jogger had been coming toward them.

The private land was bordered by a black spiked iron fence that disappeared inside a wide strip of natural vegetation. Beyond the strip was a gentle rise of manicured grass up to an English-designed cottage. And up at one corner of the cottage there had been a sun-darkened man and a girl standing face to face.

The man had been bare chested and bare legged, wearing only shorts and a floppy hat removed from his head to pop against his leg. The girl had been tall, brown, also bare legged, in a faded shift or house dress. She had looked many years younger than the man. Behind the couple was more high vegetation. The strip of palmetto and fern came down the opposite side of the manicured yard to the sand.

Shayne had recollection of noting that the man seemed to take something from his pocket to hand to the girl, but had dropped the object. Both man and girl had jackknifed reflexively to retrieve it from the grass. In that instant Gerald Romig's head had cracked open.

Shayne pushed up on his knees and snorted sand from his nostrils as he jammed the .45 into its rig. He felt sure the sniper had faded. Mission accomplished. Gerald Romig lay dead on the beach. If the body

was not moved, the high tide would get him within two hours, take him out into the harbor with its ebbing, then eventually return him, perhaps a mile or two down the sand.

But the tide was not going to win today.

Shayne squinted down the beach. The jogger was going in the opposite direction now, dwindling. Behind him, two strolling girls approached. They were a quarter of a mile away, not paying any attention. Or, if they had noticed, all they had seen was a fat man flat on his belly and sunning—nothing unusual on a Florida beach. Shayne retrieved his hat, took the thousand dollar bill from his shirt pocket and tucked it into Romig's jacket pocket.

Romig hadn't got around to telling him why he needed a private eye. It was an old client of Shayne, Alfred E. Lewis, real estate mogul and long-time acquaintance, who had called to inform him Romig had a problem the redhead might be able to solve.

Shayne ducked into the undergrowth on the private side of the iron fence, squatted and looked back down the beach. The two girls continued to approach, apparently oblivious of their impending discovery. Shayne made his way up through the growth until he

was opposite the cottage. The man and girl were no longer in sight.

He remained in concealment, studying the terrain. From his vantage, he could see that the natural growth formed a horseshoe around the manicured property, coming up from the beach, curving across the back of the property, returning down to the beach. There was a slight break in the back ring. A narrow macadam road disappeared into the green thickness. Shayne guessed that somewhere back there was a gate in the iron fence and that the road would continue on out to the highway about a mile in the distance.

The cottage had been constructed of white stone and planted about thirty yards up the rise from the beach. It was very English looking with vines climbing the white walls, but carefully cut back from the windows. The roof had been fashioned from red half-tiles. A large red front door with a glistening brass knocker gleamed in the bright sunlight.

The cottage also looked uninhabited. But the detective knew that was not true.

He stood, took a breath, left his concealment. He moved on long strides across the pampered grass, his hat shoved to the back of his head, his large

body fluid, his gray eyes screwed down in the rugged frame of his face. But there was no movement anywhere, either inside the growth beyond the cottage or through any of the glinting windows. He used the brass knocker, rapping hard. But the door did not swing open.

Mike Shayne scowled and walked to the south side of the cottage. The man and the girl had to be around somewhere. He found an American element in the English architecture—a patio, extending from front to rear. It was half-screened, half-opened, looked like an after-thought.

There was another American element at the back of the house—a long and open carport, little more than a thin metal sun roof fastened to a string of white posts. Under the roof were an ancient and faded blue VW, an aged but powerful-looking four-wheel-drive, three-quarter ton truck, what looked like a lifeboat from a sea-going vessel bounced on a trailer, and a small air compressor.

There also was a windowless storeroom. The storeroom door was closed and locked with a padlock.

Shayne went back to the patio and put his nose against the screen, cupping his hands around his eyes. The interior of

the patio was empty, but there was a door. He entered the patio, knocked on the cottage door.

Nothing.

Then suddenly the door swung open and he was confronted by a tall and beautiful young lady. She looked stone-faced, her green mottled eyes unsure. "Yes?" she said finally in a voice that was whisper soft.

"You two okay up here?" asked Shayne.

"Yes."

"You see what happened down there on the beach?"

"No . . . not really."

"Miss, may I come in?"

She stepped back. Shayne entered the cottage. It was cool inside. He swept off his hat. The man was not in sight. Then the detective felt the double cricles of metal on the back of his head.

"Move, mate," said a threatening voice, "and you be Deep Six . . . lunch for the fishies."

III

SHAYNE FELT AS IF he were on an execution block. He remained steeled, waiting, not risking protest. Words, movement, even a deep breath might trigger the executioner. But it was the girl who took the play.

"Father . . ." she breathed, her eyes flickering in uncertainty, ". . . it can't be *this* man. I saw him on the beach. I remember turning and seeing—"

"Aye," interrupted the voice behind the detective. Shayne felt the pressure leave his head. "I saw him, too, lass."

Then the voice added, "You can breathe again, laddie."

Shayne turned. The man wore faded khaki shorts and a floppy blue denim hat. He looked in his early sixties, preserved in a well-weathered way. Dry brown upper torso skin looked like a tough coating laid on sinewy muscles. Arm veins were prominent. His eyes were small with permanent lines flaring back from the outer corners. Long fingers cradled an ugly-looking cutoff shotgun.

"Speak," said the man. "Tell us why you are trespassing on my property."

"Because, less than five minutes ago, I was walking on the beach with a man who was shot dead by a sniper—and that gunshot came from someplace around your house. Probably from that growth to the south."

The man nodded. "It did," he agreed. "Which still doesn't explain your trespassing, laddie. Most mates I know would be shakin' in their britches about now, but not you . . . no, here

you be, pokin' your nose round where it ain't supposed to be. How come?"

Shayne got out his identification and displayed it.

"Ahhh!" said the man. He grunted, bobbed his head, turned from Shayne and went across the room. It was a comfortable room, simply appointed, male, with little trinkets from the sea scattered here and there.

Shayne watched the man remove two shells from the shotgun and snap the gun into a wall rack. It became an ornament. "Got it from a Chinese laddie in Hong Kong in forty-seven," he said. He dropped the shells casually into a small drawer of a table, then went to a window and looked down at the beach.

"Who's dead down there?"

"Man named Gerald Romig."

The thin man turned, studied Shayne from a squint. Then he nodded suddenly. "Name's Clive Tate. I be retired from the sea. This here is my place. That's my daughter, Kris. I've already called Fred Maxwell. Fred's the sheriff. He'll be coming in soon."

He faced the window again, stared outside. "Couple of young 'uns down there now. They looked scared, don't know what to do. There they go, hightailing it back down the

beach. That's Mr. Romig, huh? Met him a couple of times. He walks the beach near every morning 'cepting when the weather's foul. Lives down there in one of them condos. Now who'd want to kill him? Why? He a special friend of yours?"

"I met him an hour ago."

Tate turned from the window. "Romig hire you to do something for him?"

"Nope."

Shayne heard a car motor approach behind the cottage. It was shut down. No siren.

Tate said, "That be Fred most likely." He went past Shayne and out to the patio. "In here, Fred," he called out.

Three men appeared outside the patio screen. "Dead un's down on the beach," Tate said. "Fella named Romig. He's new around here. Been living down in the condos about a month or so."

Sheriff Maxwell sent the two deputies down to the sand. He entered the patio, swept off a hat and nodded to Clive Tate. He was a man of medium stature of perhaps fifty years, neat in body and dress. He looked straight at Shayne, waiting.

Shayne introduced himself, explained his presence. The sheriff frowned. "Romig didn't get around to saying why he



wanted a private detective from Miami?"

"No."

"So who was the man, Mr. Shayne?"

"Hell, I didn't know him."

"You're walking a beach with a man who wants to hire you, the man is killed by a sniper, and you can honestly stand there and tell me you don't know anything at all about Gerald Romig?" said the sheriff.

"That's the way it shapes, sheriff. I think Romig was about to explain when he bought it."

"Hmm." The sheriff didn't seem convinced, but he moved his eyes to Clive Tate. "You talk to Romig much, Clive?"

Tate shook his head. "Four or five times on the beach, maybe, Fred. He seemed friendly enough, but you know me—don't have much time for idle

yakking. You probably know as much about the man as I do, maybe more."

"Saw him in town a few times," mused the sheriff. "Knew he was new in the condominiums. Seemed a quiet fella. A loner, I guess you could say."

"Uh-huh," agreed Tate.

"Well, maybe somebody at the condominium got to know him."

"Maybe," nodded Tate. Then he added, "Though now I recollect, I don't remember ever seeing Romig with anybody—that is, nobody but Shayne this morning."

Sheriff Maxwell switched his look back to the redhead, frowned, pinched the bridge of his nose with thumb and forefinger. "Shayne . . ." he began, let it hang. He seemed caught up in deep speculation. Then, "Shayne, what if Romig wasn't who he said he was? Say he was living here under an assumed name, say he was more or less hiding out here . . .

Maxwell paused, "Say he was from your territory, Miami. That might explain how he happened to know about you, your line of work."

Maxwell was fishing. Shayne said, "It was a mutual acquaintance who put us in touch. He asked me to come down here and talk with him."

Maxwell seemed to consider before nodding. "That's possible," he conceded. "But . . ."

Again he let the words hang and Shayne sensed fresh speculation was coming.

"I'm going to hit this thing on the premise the sniper is not from around Palmetto Cove," Maxwell continued. "Romig hasn't lived in this area long enough to make enemies. No one around here knows him."

Shayne would have kept all options open.

"Therefore I have to look someplace else for the killer," Maxwell said. "Dig into Romig's background."

He put on his hat, turned out of the room. "Come on down to the beach with me, Mr. Shayne, and show me exactly what you and Mr. Romig were doing when he got it, tell me what you saw and heard. I need details."

Tate tagged along. The girl remained in the yard by the cottage. Shayne filled in the sheriff. Then Maxwell asked Tate, "Is Kris standing about where you two were when the shot was fired?"

Tate nodded.

Mike Shayne said, "A little closer to the corner of the house, sheriff. Move her back and to her left about two steps, then turn her to face west and you'll have it."

Clive Tate called to his daughter, positioned her and Shayne continued, "Tate took off his hat, popped it against his leg, put it on again, then dug something out of his pocket, started to hand it to his daughter, dropped it. They both bent to retrieve—"

"The VW keys," Tate broke in. "Kris was going in to town to pick up some odds and ends. I dropped the car keys."

"Just as they bent, the shot was fired," Shayne continued. "From the angle, I'd say the sniper was in the vegetation immediately behind them, a little to their right. Tate, you and your daughter had a damn close call."

Tate flicked his nose, stared up toward his daughter, said nothing as the sheriff bent over Gerald Romig. He poked fingers into the pockets of the beach jacket, came up with the folded thousand-dollar bill. He held it aloft between two fingers and looked at Shayne.

"It was offered," said Shayne.

"I'd say you're kind of expensive."

"Or that Romig was a potential big spender," Shayne suggested.

"Uh-huh." Sheriff Maxwell scratched his thigh. "Mr. Romig maybe has a healthy bank balance somewhere." Maxwell tucked the bill into his shirt

pocket behind the sheriff's badge. "Okay, let's see if our sniper friend left any calling cards."

They found the sniper's place in the vegetation, examined it without moving around. Some grass and ferns were flattened. Nothing else.

The sheriff squatted, eyed down to the beach. "Clear view," he said, then added, "Damn good thing you *did* drop the keys, Clive. You and Kris were right in line."

They walked out into the yard and Maxwell went on, "I want to talk to Doc, stop at the condominium. Clive, you and Mr. Shayne be in my office in about thirty minutes? Need to get what you have to say on tape."

Shayne wanted to protest, decided it would do no good. Maxwell already was returning to the beach. Tate removed his hat, bounced it against his thigh, looked at Shayne, grinned suddenly. "I've got a hunch, laddie, this day is all shot to hell."

Tate put on a faded shirt and clogs. Shayne's large Buick was at the condominium. Tate persuaded him to fold into the VW. The detective felt as if he were riding in an egg crate while Tate piloted the little car along a narrow blacktop road, through an open gate and out

to the highway that curved into Palmetto Cove. Tate meshed gears expertly.

It was two and one-half miles into town. Shayne wasn't sure where they picked him up, but about halfway to the city limits, he spotted the tail in the outside rear-view mirror on his side of the VW. Their shadow was alone in a plain tan sedan. When Tate braked in front of the sheriff's office, the man in the sedan went on to the next intersection, made a U-turn, then braked against the curb across the street. He did not get out of the sedan.

IV

TATE STOOD IN THE street, waved Shayne toward him. "Need to stop at the bank. Walk over with me. Fred ain't here yet. Car ain't in the lot at his office."

As they walked across the street, the detective shot a look down toward the tan sedan. The driver sat slouched behind the steering wheel. He looked young, had a round face, was wearing dark glasses and a flowered shirt. The plates on the car were from out of state but at the distance Shayne couldn't make out which state.

They entered the bank. It was cool inside, the lobby small. Tate stopped at one of

four counters in the middle of the lobby and made out a cash slip, but instead of going to a teller window he asked a secretary to announce him to Mr. Tardorff.

Tardorff saw them immediately in a private office. It was a comfortable office, carpeted and luxurious in gleaming furnishings. Edward Tardorff, the bank president, was a narrow man of sixty-plus years with thin white hair and an affable handshake and manner. He wore a conservative blue suit, white shirt and dark necktie, and looked small-town prosperous. He and Clive Tate seemed to be close friends.

Tate told Tardorff about the beach killing. The banker sobered, then said, "I wasn't acquainted with Mr. Romig. Oh, we were introduced on an occasion or two, but I really didn't know him. He didn't have an account with us, probably hadn't gotten around to a transfer yet. He's only been in our community . . . what, Clive? Four—six weeks?"

"About a month."

"Murdered by a sniper!" The banker shuddered. "That's a chilling thought. What did Sheriff Maxwell have to offer?"

"He's baffled, Ed."

"Yes, I should think so. Well, what is it I can do for you, Clive?"

Tate handed him the slip. "A quiet withdrawal, Ed? I ain't saying your tellers are nosey, I ain't saying they ain't. But I'd like to have a thousand dollars, cash, taken from one of my accounts."

Ed Tardorff placed the slip in a drawer of his desk. "It will sit there for a few days, Clive." He picked up a phone, asked for a thousand dollars in hundreds. It was delivered by a young girl who looked nineteen and nervous.

Tate folded the money and stuffed it into a pocket of his shorts, stood up. "Thanks, Ed."

The banker waved a hand, looked at Shayne. He smiled. "I believe you're the first honest-to-God private detective I have met. I hope I never have use for you, Mr. Shayne."

Shayne shrugged. "Things happen."

Tate's clogs slapped lightly against the lobby floor as they crossed the area. The street door swung in and the young man from the tan sedan entered. He swept off the dark glasses as he approached. He nodded, said, "Mr. Tate," went on to one of the lobby counters.

Tate said, "Andy," without breaking stride. At the street door, Shayne stopped ahead of Tate, yanked it open for the ex-seaman and stepped aside. It allowed him another glance at

the young man, who stood scribbling at a lobby counter. He looked thirty, athletic and pink in the flowered shirt, plus faded jeans and scuffed tennis shoes.

On the sidewalk, Shayne asked, "Who was that?"

Tate looked surprised. "Lad-die named Andy Hamilton. Schoolteacher out west some-place, I understand. He's stay-ing at one of the motels south of my place—vacationing, I guess. He's been at the cottage three—four times, has an interest in Kris. Met her on the beach one morning a week or so ago. Andy's one of these phys-i-cal nuts, a jogger. Seems like a decent sort."

Tate chuckled, stepped into the street. "That Kris! She sure draws the laddies." He wagged his head. "But guess she should. She's a beauty, okay. Must be what makes her a good model. These New York people are always wanting her to go to London, Paris, places. Hey . . . where you going, Shayne?"

Shayne walked down to the tan sedan. It carried Idaho license plates. He memorized the number and curved across the street. Tate stood in front of the squat building housing the sheriff's office. He looked curious.

"He tailed us coming into town," said Shayne.

"Oh?" Tate rubbed his nose. "Maybe he thought Kris was in the car."

"He took *me* for your daughter?"

Tate grunted. "Don't hardly think so. So he just happened to be coming along the highway same time we was. Come on, let's go talk to Fred. He's here now, saw his car in the parking lot."

Shayne glanced across the street as they entered the building. He saw Andy Hamilton come out of the bank, turn down the sidewalk to the sedan.

All seemed innocent, but Shayne couldn't put down the presentiment he had about Andrew Hamilton.

Sheriff Maxwell had a phone jammed between ear and mouth as Shayne and Tate were ushered into his office by one of the deputies who had been at the beach. Maxwell waved to a pair of chairs in front of his desk as he continued to listen. The neatness of the man was reflected in his office. It was tidy.

Maxwell finally put the phone together after a, "Thanks, Paul." He sat for a moment, staring hard at Shayne, then said, "You carry a gilt-edged reputation as a square shamus, Shayne."

He paused, took a deep breath and sat forward sud-

denly. "I was checking on you," he said bluntly. "I know several people up in Dade County. They say you're a breed all by yourself, but that you're straight and solid. On the other hand, nobody up there seems to know a Gerald Romig, at least not by that name."

"I think he was out of another part of the country," said the redhead.

"Yeah?"

"Gut feeling. Romig's speech, his body actions. He was quick of tongue and movement, almost jerky. New York, I'd say. Some place up that direction."

"I'll ride with Shayne on that, Fred," Clive Tate put in. "I've met many a man in my day. Romig was Northeast U.S."

The sheriff sat back in his chair. "Well, I didn't turn up anything at the condominium. Romig didn't mix. He was renting with an option to purchase, supposedly trying out the place. He's paid for another month. So far it's been a cash deal, so there's been no need for credit references—which leaves me nothing to double check."

Maxwell wagged his head. "Damn! The more I find out about that man, the less I know." Then he looked at Shayne. "And you're sure you didn't get a *smell* of what he wanted from you?"

"He didn't want to talk indoors. He wanted to walk the beach. But he didn't say anything as we walked toward Tate's place either. He seemed to be pondering, weighing. Then, *bang*, he's dead at my feet."

"The thousand dollars... what do you call it, was it to be a retainer?"

"It was a jumping-off point."

"That your normal retainer?"

"No."

"So you figure Romig was making sure of you? He really wanted you?"

"He got my attention," admitted the redhead.

"But what did he *want*?" Maxwell banged a fist against his desk in sudden frustration, then cooled just as quickly. "If we knew *that*, we might have a lead to why he was killed."

"Maybe," cautioned Shayne. "Maybe not."

"Shayne," put in Tate, "where do you figure you stand now with this killer? Aren't you in danger? The sniper has no way of knowing how much Romig might have passed on to you before—"

"If he was afraid of me, he could have killed me on the beach, Tate. A couple of extra seconds and he could've squeezed off another shot. I was wide open."

"In other words," said the

sheriff, "you're theorizing whatever Romig had to offer to you wasn't important in the sniper's mind. Romig was to die, and his death might or might not have anything to do with the fact he was walking the beach with you?"

"Romig could've been alone out there this morning," said Shayne. "He was dead."

"Could be," Maxwell agreed. "Just could be. Okay, how about you two telling all over again just exactly what you saw, heard and suspect? Don't skip any detail. I want it on tape."

Thirty minutes later, Shayne and Tate walked out of the sheriff's office and folded into the VW. Shayne looked down the street. The tan sedan was gone. Tate pointed the VW toward the condominium and the detective's Buick. There was an empty parking slot beside the detective's car. Tate wheeled into it, shut off the motor. Shayne finally got one long leg out of the cramped quarters, then Tate stopped him. He passed the detective the folded thousand dollars.

Shayne stared at him.

"You told Fred a thousand dollars gets your attention. I'm matching what Romig offered."

"So talk fast," said Shayne, "before you get what Romig got. I don't need two prospec-

tive clients shot out from under me in one day."

Tate chuckled and turned his stare out through the windshield. There was no humor in it."

"I think the sniper missed his target," Tate said. "I think I was it."

V

"I BOUGHT MY PLACE in the middle thirties, Shayne," said Clive Tate, "while I was still a pup and it was virgin land nobody else wanted. I bought forty acres, stretching all the way from the water back beyond where they later put in the highway. I developed what's developed over the years, built the cottage. I've got clear title.

"Now everybody wants my place. I've been offered a million dollars, twenty thousand per acre and a couple of hundred thousand for what I've put on it. Ed Tardorff says I'm crazy in the head for not taking the offers, but my place is my anchor, Shayne, the only thing I've ever owned, the only place I've ever had to land.

"I was a sea wanderer all my life—cargo vessels. Merchant Marine, a war or two tossed in here and there. That's finished. I'm a landlubber now and that's my place outside of town. Only trouble is I've got some barracuda after me."

He stopped, slid Shayne a glance. "You've still got my attention," the detective told him, firing a cigaret and trailing smoke from his nostrils.

"That ring of natural terrain around my place?" Tate spoke rhetorically. "I like to keep things natural as possible. But the ring is my buffer zone, blocks out what the barracuda have done on both sides of me. Those barracuda? Two big land development companies, both with rows of needle-teeth ready to chomp down on me.

"One's building the fancy condos like this place in front of us, the other—to the south of me—is the hotel-motel bunch. And both want my place, been pressing hard for better'n two years now. For one thing I've got the only natural cove on this little strip of coast. For another..." He let it tail briefly.

"Aw, the hell with why they want it. They want. And I guess one of them has figured now I ain't gonna sell, so somebody was sent to kill me. I threw him a curve when I dropped the car keys and bent to get them. The slug that was for me caught Romig. Why else would the sniper be on my property? He could kill Romig from anywhere along the beach almost any morning. He wouldn't use my place."

Tate stopped talking, seemed waiting for the detective to agree with his speculation.

Shayne didn't agree, but said, "And you want what from me? The sniper? The guy who paid for him?"

Tate surprised the detective. "No, laddie." He shook his head. "No man alone whips a barracuda—in the sea or out. I have to make a decision. Either I sell or I go on dodging bullets. What I don't need is my daughter in the way. She almost got killed this morning, Shayne. I want her away from here—*fast*.

"She has another life, lives in another world. There's the modeling and she's a sharp businesswoman, too—owns a couple of apartment buildings in Miami, for instance. She's only here for a breather, but she has to leave now. The thou is for you to convince Kris to go.

"I don't care how you do it. Lie to her, tell her you're working on the case and you want her gone, scare hell out of her if you have to; tell her . . ."

Tate shut up as Shayne yanked the old tar's palm open and slapped the ten hundred-dollar bills in it. Shayne got out of the VW, jackknifed to look inside. "You're the father, Clive. You tell her."

Tate looked chagrined. "Aye, laddie."



"After you decide whether to run *from* or run *down* a sniper, I've got an office in Miami if you want some help."

Tate waved goodbye. Shayne got into his Buick and headed north out of Palmetto Cove. He didn't have a good feeling about the day. It had been a day of violence and the surfacing of intriguing and mysterious people. Romig? Who was he? Why had he been killed? What had he wanted with a Miami private eye?

Was it finished? Case closed before it opened. Had Romig really been what he appeared to be—a loner acting on his own? Had everything gone down the tube with the splitting of his skull?

Andrew Hamilton? A tail.

There was no doubt in Shayne's mind. Young Hamilton had been watching.

Watching whom? Clive Tate—or a redhead private eye? Was there a link between Romig and Hamilton? Would a detective be hearing from Hamilton?

Or was Hamilton a cool sniper? Had he killed, then circled around, climbed into a heap and tailed to watch the proceedings in and around the sheriff's office? But if he had accomplished his mission, why did he hang around Palmetto Cove? His logical move was calmly to pack his car and drive off down the highway.

Unless it was as Clive Tate had suggested, that Romig had been an accidental kill, leaving Clive and his lurking barracuda—and his daughter.

Kris Tate, Shayne gathered, was not a permanent resident of the cottage. She was a beautiful young female, a model, a businesswoman whose real world was in another sphere, according to her papa. Had an enemy from that other world trailed her home to father, drawn down on her with a telescopic sight, then missed when she, too, had bent to pick up dropped car keys?

Shayne turned his thoughts to driving as he cruised into the heavy evening Miami traffic.

The day had erupted, okay. That slug smacking into Romig's skull was like a rock coming out of nowhere to splay a windshield. Tiny cracks spread like threads of lightning, remained.

Down deep inside, Shayne wished he had a hook, something to pull him back to Palmetto Cove. He felt caught up in something—he also felt as if he was dangling.

The evening sun was split by the horizon when the detective finally reached his apartment. He shaved and showered and then sat in a deep chair in the front room, nursing a cognac and once again reliving the day. The desk downstairs called to say a young lady wanted to see him. He frowned briefly, then put on trousers and padded barefooted across the front room as the door chime sounded. Kris Tate stood on his threshold in a bright red, form-hugging jumpsuit and with bare toes sticking out of web sandals.

She cocked her head and looked him over. Her lips curved slightly in approval before she said, "I begin with phone books when I need an address. You alone?"

He nodded, waited in mild curiosity.

"Married?"

"No."

"Living with someone?"

"No."

"Good. Then you can buy me a drink and something to eat."

"Who said I'm going out?"

She entered his apartment, turned and cocked her head again. The slight smile remained. "A man returns home from a frustrating day, shaves, showers, changes clothing to sit alone in his front room and drink himself into the carpeting? Or do you have an appointment?"

He went past her and into his bedroom. "Ever been to The Beef House?" he called back through the open door.

"If you like it, I'll probably like it," she replied from out of sight in the living room. There were a few seconds of silence, then she said, "This is a comfortable place, a little ancient, perhaps. I have two modern apartment buildings in the city, Mr. Shayne, should you ever be—"

"I won't be," he broke in. "I like the air in this neighborhood. I've been breathing it for years. What do you want?"

"To hire you to protect my father, and—if possible—find out who attempted to kill him this morning."

VI

SHE HAD ARRIVED in the VW.

Shayne directed her around the apartment building and down the ramp into the basement garage, where she braked in a visitor's stall near the attendant's cage. Shayne put her in the Buick. He'd had enough riding with his knees around his ears for one day.

"First things first, I suppose," said Kris Tate as they cruised toward The Beef House. "I can afford you. I'm popular in my field—currently to the tune of two to three hundred grand annually, and I have an agency screaming at me to return to work. But I've earned this break—it's one of the offshoots of being popular. I'm taking it, the agency can go to hell for the moment. I also have my property here. I—"

"You can afford me," interrupted Shayne without looking at her. "And I have an efficient secretary who is hell on mailing statements. Okay?"

He felt her glance. She remained silent for a few seconds, then she laughed softly. "Okay. And I'll shut up until you're ready to ask questions."

They were settled at a table, had cognac and Black Russian in hand and sizzling steaks on order before he looked Kris Tate straight in her green eyes and said, "Your father talked to you about the barracuda?"

She looked honestly puzzled.

"Barracuda? I haven't seen father since you two went into town to talk to the sheriff. I spent most of the afternoon sitting alone on the beach and mentally searching father's past—what I know of it—looking for a reason to prompt someone to try kill him.

"Then a friend jogged past, said he'd seen you and father in town, wondered who you were. He also said he'd seen you leaving Palmetto Cove, heading to Miami. By then I'd decided to attempt to hire you, so I left father a note and I'm here. What is this about barracuda and—"

Shayne waved her down. "Your father will explain. Who was your friend? Andrew Hamilton?"

She sipped the Black Russian, studied him intently before she said softly, "You certainly are a man of mild surprises, Mr. Shayne. How would you know about Andy? But, yes, Andy jogged in from the motel and—"

"He's a schoolteacher from Idaho."

"Yes," she nodded.

"Your father and I ran into him in town," Shayne said. "So what's your theory about the shooting? You're figuring Gerald Romig wasn't the intended victim."

She became very somber as

she rotated the drink glass in long fingers.

"You think the sniper missed his target when your father bent to pick up dropped keys?"

"Yes."

"As I recall, you too bent to pick up the keys, doll."

The glass in her fingers became still. She stared without blinking.

"Perhaps you were the target."

"Me?" She sounded as if it were the most surprising thought she had ever experienced.

"Hell, you're an attractive woman," he continued. "There's a boyfriend somewhere, a lover, maybe lovers. Jealousy can squirt strange juices. Or you're a businesswoman, and you obviously aren't involved in penny-ante dealings. Then there's your line of work. Modeling can be cutthroat stuff sometimes, I hear. All I'm saying, doll, is—"

She cut him off with a vigorous shake of her head. "No!" She looked at him headon. "Lordy, do you ever miss a trick?"

"Angles are my business."

"Male companions, female companions, I have both." She fishtailed with a hand. "But they are acquaintances, friends, friends of friends, business associates. Nothing more. No one

person stands tall above the others. I don't have the time or the inclination at present. Perhaps someday. Not now.

"As to my investments, I'm the bankroll. There's a tall building here in the city, with thousands of people running around inside. I talk to some of these people occasionally, no more than two at one time, I write checks and these beautiful people take my checks and make my bank accounts gain weight. I'm happy with the arrangement, I think they are happy.

"New York? The agency?" She shrugged. "Yes, there are girls who are hungry for what I get offered almost weekly. But is one of them going to hire a professional killer? Okay, so one does, I'm really on someone's list, but kill me at my father's home in Florida? Hell, I'm more vulnerable walking down a busy street in New York City, London, Paris . . .

"Ahh, here comes our food, thank God. I'm famished!"

Later, she sat back, cigaret smoke curling up from between her fingers. "Excellent," she breathed. "You have taste, Mike Shayne." But they were idle words, mouthed reflexively as she stared at the rich green color of her crème de menthe. She tasted the drink, then said suddenly, "My father's past

may have caught up with him—finally."

Shayne pulled deep on his cigaret. "Shoot, doll."

"My mother. Years ago. She was an Indian. Bermudan." Kris Tate rolled the goblet in her fingers. "My father had been at sea all of his life. Then he found mother, and Bermuda became the only real land base he'd ever known. They married, I was born, father went to sea again—and mother was rape-killed."

She paused, sipped. "My father returned—for me. And, there are those who say, for revenge. There was a rape-killer suspect, a young man named Larry Drew, who was questioned, I understand, for weeks by the police but never charged. Nor was there ever a trail.

"Larry Drew drowned at sea in fifty-one. His body, half eaten by fish, was finally recovered. Many were suspicious of father. Had he had his revenge? But he has never said a word, to my knowledge. He used to smile a little, pass off the death with a flick of his hand. Now he pretends not even to remember the name Drew."

She lit a fresh cigaret, streamed smoke from her nostrils. "Father left the sea after mother's death. He came to

Florida, where he had made his land purchase years earlier. He had the cottage built, we moved in, I was educated and went off to be what I am today. Mike..."

She stopped suddenly, studied the cigaret smoke curling up. "Is it possible that, after all these years, mother's death, Larry Drew's death, could be coming back to haunt father?"

"Spell it out," Shayne said from deep thought.

"Drew Enterprises," she said significantly. "Here in Miami."

"Big," nodded Shayne. "Probably in the city's top ten financially."

"Larry Drew's father. Mr. Drew could afford to hire a professional killer."

"Uh-huh. But why wait until now? Drew already was in gold in fifty-one. Why wait until twenty-six years later?"

"That part bothers me, too," agreed Kris Tate, putting down the cigaret and sipping the green liquid. "But Larry Drew is all I can draw from father's past. It's weak, too weak really, I guess."

"Yeah," said Shayne.

But wheels were spinning inside his skull. The financial world was a mysterious world, filled with caverns and shadowy maneuverings. Perhaps one of Clive Tate's barracuda was fueled by Drew money. It

was worth certainly checking. "Mike?"

The change in her tone alerted him. She was sitting forward now; her right elbow cocked on the edge of the table, thumb and forefinger cupping the side of her face. She talked from behind her palm: "There's a man at the bar, a rather gawky character who looks a little used. He came in about ten minutes ago, and he's been watching us ever since. He's using the backbar mirror."

Shayne spotted the man immediately, nodded.

Kris Tate whispered, "Do you know him?" She risked another glance toward the bar, then almost gasped. "Lordy, he's coming over here!"

Shayne squared himself on the table. "Careful," he muttered, "This guy can be dangerous."

The man had reached them. He stood towering over them, slat-thin, almost cadaverous-looking, rumpled in a casual, don't much-give-a-damn way. His eyes had become hooked on Kris Tate and hung there.

Shayne said nothing, waited. Kris Tate sat as if shocked into immobility.

Then the man said flatly, "Mike."

"Tim."

"And from what planet—my true Irish friend—did we pluck

this beautiful, windblown . . .”

“The hell with the both of you,” Kris Tate put in suddenly. Her green eyes flashed. She sat back and relaxed as both men laughed gently.

“Name’s Tim Rourke, ma’am,” said the tall man. “You-all are right pretty. I’ve been noticin’ from the bar.”

“Turn it off, Mr. Rourke. Your imitation of a Southerner stinks.”

He grinned suddenly, drank from the glass in his hand.

“And pull up a chair,” added Kris Tate. “What is that you are drinking?”

Rourke hooked a chair at the next table with his foot, then positioned and straddled it easily. He continued to talk to Kris Tate. “Rye whiskey. I’m a tricorn man, really. Rye whisky, blondes, and a good newspaper story. My life. Equidistant between the points, no matter how you turn the triangle. You?”

“You’re a newspaper reporter?”

“You?” he repeated.

“Free for an evening in Miami.”

“Ahh! And you *are* a blonde. Well . . . sorta.” Rourke suddenly seemed to remember Shayne. He looked at the detective, lifted an eyebrow. “Mike?”

Shayne stood. “My mother is waiting for me to bring home a



chocolate malt.” Then he added significantly, “Nothing, Tim.”

Rourke nodded. It was little more than a jerk. “Okay.”

“Hey!”

Kris Tate didn’t shout. She merely flashed fresh looks at each of them. Shayne said, “You explain, Tim.” He looked at the girl. “See you at your father’s place at nine in the morning.”

She was briefly somber as she nodded. Then Shayne turned from them. He heard Tim Rourke saying, “Mike and I have had this understanding

for years, my lovely. There are times for a fullblown newspaper story and there are times . . ."

Shayne passed out of earshot. He stopped at the cashier's slot, handed her the tab. "Mr. Rourke will take care of it when he leaves," said the detective. "And add ten for a tip."

He left The Beef House, chuckling. But he was sober in the Buick, in deep thought. He had his hook in the sniper killing now, and somehow he felt more at ease. It was time to yank down the necktie, strap on the .45, shove back the hat and start stomping on toes.

He put the Buick in its customary parking slot in the basement of his apartment building, glanced at the VW as he moved toward the self-service elevator. The little heap would be gone in the morning.

The elevator whisked him up to his floor. Inside his place, he stripped down to shorts, poured cognac and an ice water chaser, got a fresh pack of cigarettes and book of matches and went to the deep chair in the front room. He settled in the darkness. Skull time.

A heavy fist banging against his door brought him to the edge of the chair. He twisted and stared through the darkness of the room.

The banging was repeated.

He growled, "Yeah," paused,

then added, "*Coming!* Don't knock the damn thing down."

He left his chair and turned to the wall, staying out of line with the door. He eased through the darkness, silent on bare feet, without bumping into anything. He didn't have to feel. He knew exactly where everything was. It hadn't been changed in years for that very reason. In total light or darkness, he could glide through the room without telltale sound.

The banging had alerted him. There was a door buzzer out there. It worked. There was a desk downstairs. From habit. Ninety-eight percent of the people who showed on his threshold used the buzzer. Ninety-nine percent of them had the desk downstairs call up their arrival . . . like Kris Tate, almost a total stranger, earlier that evening.

He reached the corner of the dark room and eased toward the door, keeping his body close to the wall.

The door exploded.

VII

THE SHOTGUN BLAST shredded the door. Had it caught his midriff, he now would be shredded on a slab in the morgue with Ray Zoner, the morgue man, poking around in his spilled innards.

Almost two hours had passed since the blast before Mike Shayne was finally rid of the curious and the cops and a mumbling building maintenance man who had boarded up the wrecked portal. The redhead dropped into the chair, drank a big slug of cognac—no chaser.

His phone jangled. He scowled. Now what? Who called private eyes at one twenty-five in the morning?

He yanked up the receiver and said, "Shayne."

"Jamie, man."

Jamie—a character who liked getting Christmas presents from Mike Shayne in June, July, August—anytime. An informer.

"Got a drift, Mike," said the street man. "From two brothers away—you know, one brother tells another brother, the other brother tells—"

"Got it, Jamie."

"Photograph of Mike Shayne being passed around. Stranger in town wants to know where Shayne wets down when he ain't in bed. Photo ain't good, I understand. Fuzzy. Ain't bad. You know who it's of. Looks kinda like maybe it was taken with a still camera from a TV screen, you know?"

"Uh-huh."

"I ain't seen it, understand, Mike—Else I'd of called earlier."

But the brother says there ain't no doubt Mike Shayne has had his picture took. Interesting?"

"Watch for Santa Claus in your mailbox a couple of days from now, Jamie."

"I get mail every day, Mike."

Shayne put the phone together and sat scowling, hands suddenly large fists, the fingers working reflexively. A photograph? He hadn't had his photo taken in years.

Not that he knew about.

But it answered one question—the shotgun man was a stranger. He had been floating and asking questions about Shayne. Miami's resident gunsels would have—or would be handed—a book on the redhead.

Shayne slept out the remainder of the morning darkness in segments. He was keyed and restless about the case now, adrenaline flowing. Deep sleep would not come again until all of this was finished and history on paper, a neat file compiled by his efficient office secretary, Lucy Hamilton.

He left the bed for good with dawn, rousted Lucy from slumber to open the file, map the day and get Jamie's Christmas gift in the mail. After he had finished the coffee royale and cigaret, he put a change of clothing and an old swimsuit into a suitcase, strapped on the .45 rig, yanked down

his hat and squeezed through the shattered door. When he arrived in Palmetto Cove, he would check into a motel and be a restless vacationer.

The elevator dropped him swiftly to the basement garage. He was three steps into the interior of the garage before he yanked to a halt. The faded VW was still in its stall over near the attendant's cage. He frowned, went to the Buick, tossed the suitcase into the trunk, then turned to the cage. The attendant stood, grinning broadly in anticipation. But Shayne didn't reach the man. A battered sedan rolling down the ramp into the garage stopped him.

Shayne stared at the sedan in silence. Its occupants returned the stare. Then Kris Tate left the car and came toward the detective. She looked freshly showered, relaxed, radiant. A smile toyed at the corners of her unpainted lips.

"Hi," she said brightly. "You are up early. I thought I'd get out of town ahead of you."

Shayne watched Tim Rourke use an empty parking slot to turn the heap around. Rourke grinned at him, lifted a hand in greeting, said nothing. He wheeled back up the ramp, looking satisfied and at peace with the world.

"You know, Mr. Shayne,"

Kris Tate said lightly, her smile taking on stature, "so far I like everything I've discovered about you—including your friend."

She went off to the VW, leaving the detective to thumb back his hat in a fresh reminder that nobody could anticipate the strange paths body chemistry might open.

At the VW, she turned. "Do I follow you, or *you* follow me?"

The undulations of her red jumpsuit still alive inside his skull, Shayne said, "I think I'll follow you."

"Somehow, that has a familiar ring," she replied. "I wonder why."

The VW rolled up the ramp and turned into the street without a break in speed. It was three quarters of a block ahead when the detective followed. The morning sky was a mixture of fast-fading gray and swiftly-spreading orange now. The air still had a night smell but the humidity was gaining quickly.

Only a few cars were rolling along the street with the Buick and the VW, and Shayne picked up their tail in his rear-view mirror in the first three minutes of driving. It was a plain tan sedan and it followed them up onto the Dixie Highway and out of the city.

Kris Tate rolled steadily at

55 mph. Shayne kept the Buick about one-half mile behind her, driving with one eye ahead and the other glued on the rear-view mirror. The driver of the tan sedan was no amateur. Occasionally the car would disappear and remain out of sight long enough to make the detective realize there was more than one plain tan sedan in existence.

Then it would be behind him again—a small blob taking shape quickly as its driver ignored the federal speed limit.

About ten miles out of Palmetto Cove, Shayne found what he had been looking for—an open stretch of highway with no turnoffs or side roads to dive into. He wheeled to the side of the highway suddenly and braked. Ahead, the taillights of the VW flashed, the little car fishtailed slightly and then was steadied and eased to the side of the concrete.

Shayne was out of the Buick and looking at a tire when the tan sedan slid by. Andrew Hamilton wore dark glasses and didn't look to the right or left. The sedan whisked past the braked VW. The detective figured Hamilton had a hand covering his profile by then.

The sedan disappeared on down the highway. Shayne lifted a hand and motioned to Kris Tate to move out. The VW

rolled. He closed in on it. The tan sedan did not show again.

VIII

KRIS TATE WHEELED the VW into a carport slot behind the cottage and vacated the small vehicle before Shayne had shut off the motor of the Buick. Her stance alerted him. She stood beside the VW, hands on hips, frowning at the three-quarter ton truck in the next slot. The trailer was hooked to the truck, but the boat that had been on the trailer the previous day was gone.

"Something?" Shayne asked.

"Father must have gone out in the whaler."

"You worried?"

"No, not worried," she said. "It's just that he didn't say anything yesterday about . . ."

She let the words trail off as she moved toward the cottage patio. Shayne followed her into the cool of the house. She stood there, looking around. It almost was as if she were listening to the silence that surrounded them. Then she said, "No note. I thought there might be."

She turned out of the house again, bouncing the ring of car keys in her palm. She went to the padlocked storeroom, selected a key and opened the lock, peered inside. When she reappeared, her frown was

deep. "I thought he might have gone fishing, but . . ."

Again she let the words tail off and Shayne had to prod. "Hey, what's bugging you?"

She shook herself, looked at him as she relocked the storeroom. She attempted a smile. "Father doesn't have a dock, as you've noticed, so he keeps the whaler up here. When he goes out, it's normal procedure to back the boat down to the water on the trailer and unload, then return the truck and trailer here. Everything's okay—but you may have to wait a few hours to talk to him. God only knows when he'll get back."

"Doll." Shayne spoke almost harshly. "You've got the wrong leg up. My clients level with me, or they hire a ten-cent shamus. Your father hasn't gone fishing. Every piece of fishing equipment the man owns is there in the storeroom. You just saw that much. But something is missing. What?"

Her jaw line tightened and her lips thinned for just an instant before she eased. "All right. One of the diving suits."

Shayne waited.

"Cardinal rule of diving," she said with a sudden lifting of hands as if in exasperation. "You don't dive alone. But father has and does. I always worry. Simple enough, Mike?"

"Uh-huh." The redhead, thumbed back his hat. "Any special reason he might be diving this morning—or is it just his hobby?"

"Oh, hobby. Father loves to dive. And he is an expert. But still, I worry when he goes alone."

"You should. It's inviting trouble," Shayne agreed. "Well . . ." He turned to the Buick. "I think I'll run on into town, see if the sheriff has turned up anything interesting on Gérald Romig. When your father comes in, tell him to stick. We need to talk."

"Yes," the girl nodded.

Shayne changed the topic abruptly. "You see Andrew Hamilton flash past us out there on the highway?"

She frowned again. "Yes?"

"Odd that he should be coming along from Miami at that hour of the morning?"

"Odd?" Her frown deepened. "Why?"

"He may have been tailing us, honey."

She looked caught up in complete surprise. Then she said, "He probably went into Miami last night for a ball. Many of the tourists who stay down here do. Miami isn't that far away, you know."

"Uh-huh," Shayne agreed. "But your father also tells me Andy Hamilton has jogged in

here a few times. Seems he might have a special interest in—”

“I know Andy,” Kris Tate interrupted. “We met on the beach a few days ago. He’s staying at one of the motels. He seems nice enough, and he’s asked me to dinner, but I have yet to accept. Mike, I think you are making a—”

“So why didn’t he stop when he saw you braked in the VW on the side of the highway this morning?”

“Well . . . perhaps he didn’t recognize me.” Her frown deepened again.

“Or hoped to hell you didn’t notice him?”

She hesitated, then exploded. “Mike, you are the most suspicious person I’ve ever been around!”

“It’s what I get paid for, doll.”

Mike Shayne rolled into Palmetto Cove, keeping a sharp eye on his rear-view mirror all the way. But no tan sedan materialized behind him. He braked at a curb on Main Street and remained at the wheel of the Buick, giving Andrew Hamilton—wheoever he was—opportunity to surface again.

The sheriff’s office was to his right and ahead. Only one official car stood in the small macadam parking lot beside the building. Tall palms at the rear



of the lot still blocked out the morning sun. Across the street, however, the bank front flashed brilliant in the sun’s reflection, almost blinding the redhead.

Shayne sat for five minutes watching the street and the morning movements of the town. No Hamilton. He finally vacated the Buick and entered the sheriff’s office, where he found the outer desk area empty.

“Hey!” he called.

Maxwell popped into view in the entry of his private office. He stopped in mid-stride, his face clouding immediately. Then he said coldly, “Yes, Mr. Shayne?”

“Got a few minutes?”

“No, I’m tied up.”

Shayne immediately sensed Maxwell's withdrawal. It was not a new ballpark. There had been other sheriffs, city cops, state cops with badges, Federals in his day—Men in official investigative roles who distrusted, disliked or had been told to send private eyes chasing butterflies.

He pushed his hat back, gazed narrow-eyed at Maxwell. "You don't want to know I've been hired by Kris Tate to find the sniper?" he said.

Maxwell's jawline jumped. "Go back to Miami, Mr. Shayne—and take the girl with you." He turned back into his office.

"Or that a tourist named Andrew Hamilton had been bird-dogging me for two days now?"

Maxwell spun on his heels. He was hunched into himself and taut, his eyes hard. "Get out of here, Shayne! I'm not supposed to talk to—"

He cut off the words, said nothing and disappeared. Shayne went to the doorway, found Maxwell standing at a window staring outside at Main Street.

"Who's laying the heat on you, Sheriff?" he asked.

"Get the hell out of here!" Maxwell said angrily. "You're not wanted in this town! If you don't leave, I may have to find an excuse to put you in one of my cells!"

"Get yourself a good lawyer to handle the lawsuit when you do, but meanwhile . . . let's see, you're a county sheriff. Okay, someone is leaning on you. Someone with more weight. That makes it State or Federal."

Maxwell remained silent.

"Who was Gerald Romig, Sheriff?" Shayne asked flatly.

The neat man said nothing.

"All right. Who is Andrew Hamilton?"

"I don't know Andrew Hamilton!" Maxwell bellowed without turning. "Get the hell out of here, fella!"

Shayne went outside into heat and sunshine. But he stopped on the sidewalk and lit a cigaret, eyes sweeping the street. Nothing out of the ordinary. He went to the Buick, plopped behind the steering wheel, sat low in thought. Sheriff Fred Maxwell no longer was in command of the investigation of the sniper killing of one Gerald Romig. Why?

Shayne went slightly lower in the seat, scowl deepending with the move as he smoked rapidly.

"Mister?"

He jerked at the sound of the croaking feminine voice, stared at the open window on the sidewalk side of the Buick. Two faces hung there, side by side. One belonged to a weathered

woman, the other was that of a pink fleshy man. The eyes in both faces were pleading.

"Mister," repeated the woman, "we're tourists, second day here, looking for the Oyster Bar. We were told—".

"Sorry," he interrupted gruffly, hitching himself up behind the steering wheel. "I'm just down from Miami."

"Oh!"

The couple stood. A sparkling camera dangling from a strap around the fat man's neck winked at the detective. Then they were gone. Shayne scowled as he surveyed the street again. His eyes became hooked on the bank building. Most banks these days had a camera system.

He started the Buick, shook off the thought as too wild. He returned to the Tate cottage. Now the VW was gone. He sat frowning for a couple of seconds, then left the car, walked toward the patio. The cottage door opened and a young man came across the porch area behind the screen. He wore bathing trunks, a red sweatband around his head and scruffed tennis shoes. He pushed open the screen door and came out to the grass. He looked at Shayne, his smooth face blank.

"Mr. Shayne," he said in greeting.

IX

"KRIS TATE?" said Mike Shayne quietly.

"No one is here," replied Andrew Hamilton.

"Except you."

Hamilton nodded. "The house is always open. I'm welcome."

"How come?"

He lifted shoulders in a slight shrug. "It's how the Tates live. I know them. What are you doing here?"

"Working."

Hamilton cocked one eyebrow. His eyes narrowed slightly. Shayne strongly suspected his display of mild surprise was feigned. "We going to keep up the charades, pal?"

Hamilton's left eyebrow lifted.

"You've been bird-dogging me. Yesterday in town, this morning along the highway in from Miami—and someone shot hell out of my front door last night."

"I'm a tourist, Mr. Shayne. I'm staying down the beach at one of the motels. I met Kris Tate a few days ago. She is a striking young woman. I'm attracted. Yesterday I saw you with her father in the bank, this morning I passed you two on the road after spending the night with friends in Miami.

"I'm curious about you. At the moment, you appear to be

an adversary. I'm somewhat jealous. On returning to my motel room this morning, I decided to jog up here, see if you were here with Kris. What is this about someone shooting your front door? Do you mean, where you live in Miami?"

"Yesterday morning, a man was shot out of his moccasins on the beach, Andy."

"I've heard." Hamilton nodded somberly. "A Mr. Romig who lived in one of the condominiums. A sniper killed him. Everyone up and down the beach has heard about that by now."

"You happen to be jogging up this way yesterday when it happened?"

Hamilton went silent.

"I saw you," said Shayne. "You were coming in. After the shot, you cut a trail. How come?"

"I... didn't want to get involved, Mr. Shayne."

"When were we introduced, Andy?"

The surprise was brief but genuine this time. Then Hamilton went cold. "My error, Shayne. But breathe easy. I wear—"

He cut off the words as the sound of the motor reached them. He twisted, shaded his eyes with a palm, looked out into the cove. Shayne squinted against the brilliance of the sun

reflecting off the rolling water.

He watched the pleasure craft grow larger. The boat was sleek, looked new and powerful. It was coming straight in. Suddenly it settled in the water and began to drift. Shayne saw an anchor go over the side. Kris Tate followed it, jumping into the waist-deep sea. She waded up to the beach and came toward them, a long and lithe Indian-brown girl, all woman in the two strips of her bright green bikini.

They met on the lawn. "Hi," she said. "Hello, Andy." She moved past them toward the cottage. "I've borrowed Mr. Tardorff's craft. I'm going out to look for father. I think I know where I'll find him."

"At the *Mary Jane*?" asked Hamilton.

"Yes."

"One of you clue me in," snapped Shayne.

"The *Mary Jane* is a wrecked pleasure craft," Kris said over her shoulder. "It's on the bottom out there in the cove. Father found it by accident while diving a long time ago. He often goes there to dive. He likes to swim around it."

They reached the storeroom. She produced a key from the palm of her hand, unlocked the room, went to the diving gear.

"Got two of those outfits?" Shayne asked.

She glanced at him in surprise.

"I'm an amateur," said the detective, "but I've done a little diving."

She nodded, patted two diving tanks hooked to the compressor. She reached up on a high shelf, took down goggles, tossed them to Shayne.

"Suit's in the Buick," he said.

He entered the house, stood in the front room, disrobed and put on the suit. When he padded across the patio, the girl and Hamilton were waiting for him. Hamilton was holding the two tanks. They went down the grass and across the hot sand. Hamilton said, "I'll ride along."

He didn't ask. He spoke with an edge of authority.

Shayne shot him a look, but Hamilton was busy wading. They boarded the boat. It sparkled, and the motor's hum was smooth as Kris turned them out to sea. Shayne found her to be an expert at the wheel. He settled back, stretched long legs and crossed ankles. His eyes became hooked on Hamilton.

The young man stood beside Kris at the wheel, seemingly at ease, but there was a tautness about him that bothered the detective. Hamilton looked and acted like a tourist from Idaho fascinated by a beautiful Florida woman, okay—on the other hand, he seemed slightly

out of character, like a good actor who just missed *naturally* filling a role. The confidence was there, but he didn't quite come across. He didn't seem relaxed.

Kris looked at the detective and stabbed air with a stiff forefinger. The whaler was dead ahead. She slowed the craft, eased in off the whaler and dropped anchor. The whaler bobbed on the gentle swells of the water. It was empty. She came forward and they slid into the tanks, hooked up.

"Ready?"

Shayne nodded.

"I'll lead," she said.

She went over the side and dropped into the water. He followed her. The last thing he saw in sunlight was Andrew Hamilton standing spread-legged on the deck of the pleasure craft, his face blank, but his eyes dark, brilliant and intent as he watched them. Then the detective was drifting slowly downward from the ceiling of light.

He rolled over, angled down and stroked, his strong legs working. The water took on a pale blue-green hue. Kris was ahead of him, going down smoothly, bubbles trailing behind her. He followed her bubble path. Then she was on the bottom, waiting for him, tiny

puffs of sand clouds drifting away from her. He joined her. Her eyes behind the goggles were deep black marbles as she pointed and stroked easily away.

He followed to her right and slightly lower, out of the bubble trail. She moved forward swiftly and it was only a matter of seconds before he spotted the shadowy outline of a huge dark hulk ahead. The hulk became a boat, flat on the bottom and tilted away from them.

Shayne saw the girl stop. She remained off the bottom, her legs drawn up slightly, her fins and arms working lazily. But she wasn't looking for him and he suddenly got the impression she was staring.

He squinted from behind the goggles, surveyed the hulk before them. There didn't seem to be anything unusual about it. Then he looked up and saw the odd-shaped dark splotch. He shot toward it, leaving Kris Tate behind.

He reached the hulk, felt his way up to the splotch. There was a large, ragged hole in the side of the craft and, wedged into the picket edge of the hole, was a foot fin. Inside the fin was a foot, and then the detective was staring inside the hole and at the drifting body of Clive Tate. No bubbles came from the tank on his back.

X

SHERIFF MAXWELL WAS like a man who suddenly finds himself attempting to tread an even path inside a whirling barrel at a carnival. He didn't want to be pacing a trail in the front room of the Tate cottage, but he had been thrust into his role. Somewhere inside the barrel an invisible force was working against him—making him step gingerly.

Shayne slouched deep in a corner chair, the entire room his stage. He watched and listened in silence, smoking one cigaret after another as Maxwell asked questions, mumbled speculations. His questions were pallid. None, for instance, even hinted at a tie between the sniper killer of Gerald Romig on one day and the drowning of Clive Tate on the next.

Sample—"Your father knew better, Kris. Hell, a man isn't supposed to dive alone. So why did he do it?"

Standing and staring out the front window of the cottage, Kris lifted shoulders and palms listlessly. She did not speak. She did not have to. Pale answer to pale question.

Hamilton's speculation—"I suppose he had been in and out of that hole a hundred times, but this time he got hung up

and there was no help around."

Shayne slid a glance toward Andrew Hamilton. Hamilton sat forward from the edge of a couch across the room, his knees spread wide, his elbows cocked on thighs, his cupped hands propping his chin. He too was watching Maxwell intently, listening, remaining silent.

He also looked like a man on the verge of decision.

He stood suddenly, went to Kris Tate. "Kris," he said, "there are things to be taken care of at the funeral home. You can ride in with Sheriff Maxwell. Shayne and I will remain here, be here when you return. You'll feel better if you get all of this done."

She looked at him. Then she nodded, said, "Yes." She walked across the room to the patio door. "May I ride in with you, Sheriff? I left my car at Mr. Tardorff's dock."

Shayne had caught the movement in the corner of Maxwell's eye. He bent to light a fresh cigarette—but he didn't miss the look that passed from the sheriff to Hamilton. Maxwell looked almost angry for an instant, then seemed to become resigned again. He turned out of the room and accompanied Kris Tate outside.

Shayne waited. Hamilton finally turned back into the room, but remained silent.



Shayne drew deep on the cigarette. "Andy," said the detective, "maybe Clive Tate was hit."

Hamilton stood like a statue.

Shayne lifted a hand. "Yesterday's target. Maybe it wasn't Gerald Romig. Maybe it was Tate. The sniper missed, hit Romig accidentally. But got Tate today. Caught him alone in the deep, made it look like a diving accident. What do you think?"

"Far out," said Hamilton.

Shayne waved the hand.

again, smoked. "Yeah—but possible." He waited. He had a strong feeling now that Hamilton was about to pick up things, put charades aside.

Hamilton went to a window, stared outside. "Why would someone want to kill Tate?" he asked.

"I don't know, Andy—any more than I know where you get the clout to lean on Maxwell."

Hamilton stiffened, turned, stared hard at the redhead. Finally he went to the couch, sat on the front edge. He looked Shayne straight in the eye.

"My name," he said, "is Tom Borger—Federal. I have credentials at the motel. You want to jog down?"

"Now we're rolling," breathed the detective. "And, no, I don't want to jog."

"There is a real-life Andrew Hamilton in Slate, Idaho. And he is a school teacher. He also is currently vacationing in Florida—but he happens to be down in the Keys."

"Okay."

"This is a narc bust, Shayne. Big. No five-and-dime. We've been tuned in for almost three years now. It includes the Western hemisphere. And Clive Tate was right smack in the middle of the road. In fact, you are at this moment sitting in the *Doorway to the U.S.A.*"

Hamilton/Borger made a sweeping gesture, taking in an area from sea to cottage.

"Here is where it's all been coming into the States, right across that strip of sand out there, up the lush grassy yard to this cozy little cottage."

XI

GERALD ROMIG HAD BEEN a federal agent, too, planted in the condominium. He had been renting the only unit with a view of the Tate place, what little view there was. His walking the beach daily had not been for esoteric pleasure—it had been assignment. Romig had been assigned to keep an eye on the cove—especially on any moves out to sea by Clive Tate.

"On our sheets," said Hamilton/Borger, "Tate was a vital cog in the network. He got into the drug running business years ago, during his active days at sea. Heroin traffic is where he made his real bread, how he could afford to buy his property, build the house, educate his daughter. He has seven bank accounts we know of. There probably are others."

Shayne remained silent.

"This property buy by Tate was a godsend for the people he was hooked up with," Borger continued. "It provided a natural gateway to the States."

Here's how they've been operating.

"They put a deep-six operation on the *Mary Jane* a few years ago. There are coordinates on it. Planes come in from South America, fly low under radar, make a drop in weighted waterproof bags. It's been Tate's end to go out in the whaler and diving gear, bring the stuff to shore, haul it into Miami in that three-quarter ton truck out back.

"The truck has a false bottom in it. Tate would wheel in to a place called Ken's Klean Kar Wash where the truck is run through the wash. During that run, the false bottom is removed, the heroin replaced by an envelope of money for Tate. From the car wash, the H went one way, Tate returned here, then made a bank deposit."

"The girl?" asked Shayne from low in his chair.

"Clean," replied Borger. "We're positive."

Shayne hitched himself up. He felt better. He went to a window, stood staring out on the cove without seeing anything. He liked Kris Tate. He used a thumb and forefinger, toyed with an earlobe in thought.

"Place me," he said suddenly.

Borger went to another window, also stood staring. "Romig was coming up zilch in his at-

tempts to get chummy with Tate. Tate was too much of a loner. Then Tate or someone else in the Organization became suspicious of Romig. At least, that was Romig's feeling. Nothing definite, Shayne. Romig sensed it, that's all. But it was enough for my people. I was brought in.

"Kris Tate had suddenly popped in out of nowhere. My people figured if I could get next to her, I also could keep an eye on her father. It would allow Romig to pack and fade. But that wasn't working either. Kris had been friendly, okay, but she's got a lot of her father in her. She's a bit of a loner, too. It sent my people back to the drawing board. They came up with you."

Borger paused. "You got an extra cigaret on you?"

Shayne tossed him the pack, flipped a book of matches, caught the returns.

Borger inhaled deeply, trailed smoke, continued. "All I can add is what I've been told. You were checked out and you came up smelling okay. You haven't lived in Florida all of your life, but you're a Floridian, wouldn't leave, you've been working your butt off the last few years. It wouldn't be earth-shaking if you decided to take a sabbatical for a few months, get away from it all—Miami, investiga-

tions, cops, heavies, your apartment.

"Okay, so you drop everything and move into a condominium down here. Pretty fancy living for Mike Shayne? Yeah, granted again, but then, hell, the guy has earned it. And he's got the bread. Your finances were checked, Shayne, and you can get angry all over the place but my people probably know more about your dollar-and-cent value right now than you do. Point: you could afford to decide to move into a condo.

"Then there's your tastes. Beach, swimming, sunning, all that's offered by living in a condo on a beachfront—in your book, *bah!* But that's okay—because, by moving in here in the first place, you've already decided to test a new life style. So we arrange the Alfred Lewis connection to get you here.

"If you don't adapt, the hell with it. During the weeks you were giving it the run, you were also doing what my people wanted—keeping an eye on Clive Tate."

"And during those same weeks," said Shayne, "should someone around here have me checked out, he isn't going to come up with any federal ties."

"Right on, Mr. Shayne." Borger nodded.

"Except that Romig got

gunned during our first contact."

Borger nodded, said, "We played the string out a bit too far."

"Got any idea who hit him?"

"Sure. A man out of nowhere—or anywhere. A pro. He could be sitting on a backyard patio tonight, teaching his kids how to cook hamburgers."

Mentally, Shayne agreed. He felt more at ease about the sniper killing now. Speculation had been removed. Romig had been the target from the top. If a sniper had wanted to kill Clive Tate, Kris Tate or a red-head private eye from Miami all it would have taken was a second shot.

"Tate have a role in the hit?"

"Could be," Borger said. "That snapping of the hat against his leg. It might have been a signal to the sniper that Romig was approaching on the beach. Romig had made it a habit to walk up here around eleven every morning. He was hoping to establish a daily contact with Tate."

"So what happened to Tate this morning?"

"Accident, I think."

Shayne shot the federal man a hard oblique glance. "You think?"

Borger flicked a finger across the tip of his nose. "There have been some whispery rumors

lately that Tate was ready to fold up his tent. He's made his bread. He wanted out. No more runs. Okay, so he quits, and that closes the natural gateway in from the sea.

"Of course, should he die . . . well, we've got a whole new can of worms. Assuming Kris Tate inherits, what does she do with this property? Keep it or peddle it? Let's say she decides to sell. No sweat to the mob. One of their people—like Tardorff the banker—can purchase and the door remains open. But if she decides not to sell . . . well, the door is suddenly slammed shut. Got it?"

"Tardorff?" asked Shayne.

"Been a mob man all of his life. His father was a mob man—in Miami—before him. He grew up in it. He's a good front for them. Good personality, good businessman. Excellent right where he is. Personable smalltown banker—who also can stay on top of financing land deals all up and down the coast. That includes the condos along here, the motels—and what we're standing on now."

Borger shook his head. Tardorff has been their watchdog on Tate and the gateway. Shayne, we think it was the friendly town banker who brought the weight down on Romig. We'll never be able to

prove it in a courtroom, of course, but *somebody* here became suspicious and . . ."

He let the words hang, added, "It might as well be Tardorff."

"Not Maxwell?"

Borger looked surprised. "No. The Sheriff wears a white hat. All of this is just a little too much for his department. Maxwell and his crew do a good job for what they were elected to do—which does not include going up against organized crime.

"I've had a talk with him. He isn't happy. He has a sense of pride in himself, in his office, in his people. He should have. But Romig's murder, the death of Tate, perhaps, go far beyond his jurisdiction. He has listened. I think he understands, but he is disturbed."

Shayne pulled at his ear. "Could it figure Tardorff sent a shotgun man after me?"

Borger frowned. "Yeah, it could. You mentioned that earlier. I'm curious."

Shayne explained, then mused, "That photo bit. Today I got to wondering if it could have come from a bank camera, maybe a still taken from a roll of film."

Borger nodded. "You may have been set up all the way, Shayne."

"Uh-huh," said the detective. "I appear on the beach with

Romig. Romig is hit while walking beside me. But instead of cutting, I press, start nosing with Tate, letting him know my line of work, that Romig had been a prospective client. He didn't have to believe me when I told him Romig hadn't gotten around to telling me why he wanted to hire a detective. Or he could have.

"Either way, he suddenly becomes a man walking on eggshells. And he hauls me to the bank to be photographed, lets Tardorff get a look at me. The boys suddenly want to know where I fit. Then somebody decides I'm dangerous—or could become dangerous—and a photo goes out to a shotgun man."

"Yes," agreed Borger with a sigh. He turned from the window, crossed the room, butted his cigaret. "Which also wipes out your value to us. So get lost fast—keeping all of this under your hat, of course."

"Not so quick, pal."

Borger stared hard at the redhead.

"The girl is a client," said Shayne. "And when I'm hired—"

"Shayne!" Borger snapped. "I've heard all about your damned bulldoggedness! You've got a rep, man, I know! I've read your file. Hire Shayne, and you hire results. You may

not like the results, but you get them one way or another. Only this time, Shayne, you're going to fade out of the picture!"

"Like a rising sun coming up out of the East on a clear morning, friend," the detective said flatly, stomping across the room and yanking open the patio door. "This way out. You've got a room down the beach. Jog off. I'm the guest here. I'm also working for a fee. Until Kris Tate tells me to fly, I'm here."

"Shayne . . ."

Borger seemed on the verge of exploding. Then he exhaled suddenly and began to pace the room. He moved on quick steps, drumming his thighs with clenched fists. On a couple of turns, he shot Shayne a hard glance, but continued to pace, his expression dark.

"You keep missing the door, pal," Shayne said.

Borger stopped, glared. "Shayne, you could foul up three years of investigation!"

"Or I could be one great big damned asset you boys didn't have two days ago!" countered the redhead, swinging shut the door with a bang. "Your man Romig is dead. Tate is dead. You people need time to regroup, to get back to the drawing board. I can give you that time."

"I'm here, I'm nosing, I'm known. I've made people ner-

vous, I'll continue to do so, merely by my presence. I'm the target now, I'll draw the heat. Get back to your board, Borger. I can handle myself for a few days, I'm a rather wary fella at times—but I can't dodge bullets forever."

Borger went to the window again, stood rigid and silent for a long time. Finally he turned. He had relaxed. He was breathing easy. "Shayne, we're sitting on the kill. Today was to be it—until Tate had that accident out there this morning. Another cigaret?"

Shayne tossed the pack and the matches. Borger lit up, blew smoke, then stood, holding the pack of cigarettes in his palm as he continued.

"A shipment left Rio yesterday, according to our man down there. Which means the plane probably swooped through here early this morning. It's why I was called in to Miami last night, to be filled in. My coming up behind Kris Tate along the highway was pure happenstance, believe me, Shayne.

"Anyway, I had an inkling about what was in the wind, and I got damned curious about why Kris was heading back to town. Maybe she wasn't so clean, after all. So I trailed her, watched her meet you and later your friend. When she and this man Rourke settled in at his

place, I caught my meet, then returned to Rourke's and trailed you two back here this morning.

"Discovering that Clive Tate was out diving gave me a few anxious moments until I learned the truck still was here and Tate had not returned to the cottage. His death really tosses us a curve. The stuff is out there somewhere, Shayne."

"Uh-huh," the detective agreed, snaking his pack of cigarettes out of the air on one of Borger's tosses. He fired a butt. "And you can bet it isn't drifting around on the bottom, getting covered by sand. It's inside the *Mary Jane*. Tate was gathering the packages, tucking them away when he got hung up."

Borger nodded.

"So let's have a look."

The federal man held up a hand. "Just a minute. Someone could be watching, and if they see us poking around the cove, there goes the kill again."

Shayne smoked and nodded. "Lay out this kill bit for me."

"The biggies," said the federal agent. "We've got a sure sight on them now. We had figured on moving in with this delivery, hit the top cat in this part of the States?"

"Top cat?"

"Gretchen Tjaden—in Miami. You've heard of her?"

The detective lifted an eyebrow. "Miami's Ms. Society? The little lady who breeds all the fancy race horses, chairperson here, chairperson there, this charity, that charity? Hey, Borger—"

"Top cat," repeated Borger firmly. "For years. Friends put the shipments together in Rio, send them north. They come in here, Tate hauls them to the car wash, gets paid—he's out of it. From the wash, the stuff goes into a trash barrel.

"Truck wheels in, trash is dumped, but instead of wheeling to incinerators, truck rolls across city, disappears inside a garage. You hang around long enough and a car comes out of the garage, rolls straight to the posh residence of Ms Gretchen Tjaden. Delivery completed."

"You know a lot."

"We've got a man inside the car wash—but we just got him in three months ago. So everything has tumbled into place, more or less, just in the last three months."

"Except that, with Tate's death, it's falling apart again."

"Yes."

"On the other hand, you could keep it all going with Kris Tate."

Borger stared.

"I've got a hunch the girl is built of strong stuff, Borger. She'll have to be told, of course.

And the part about her father is going to be rough on her. But she could just climb on your wagon, be what you need.

"She could bring in the stuff, haul it to the car wash. Sure, she'll be a surprise to those people, but maybe she can pull it off, convince them she and papa didn't have any secrets, she's known through the years papa was running drugs for the mob."

Borger was shaking his head before Shayne quit talking. "Too dangerous for her, Shayne. They'd kill her and speculate later about how she came up with the stuff."

"Maybe," said Shayne, "except that's where *we* come in. We make sure she doesn't get killed. One of us is on her all the way. The first sign of rough stuff we move in and the hell with the big kill!"

Borger continued to shake his head. "Too risky—especially with you on the scene. Hell, you're *known*, man!"

"She drops me," said Shayne. "We give her time to spread the word around Palmetto Cove, to let Tardorff hear. She no longer needs me with her father dead. I cut, return to Miami, pick her up when she wheels into the car wash in the truck."

Borger began to pace again, his steps quick, his turns jerky. Shayne remained silent. Borger

had to make the decision. Finally he said, "Do you really think she's that strong?"

"I do."

"If you're right, you're a hel-luva judge of people."

"As you informed me, pal," said Shayne, "I've built a nest egg over the years—and it's all been dealing with people."

XII

KRIS TATE SHUDDERED. It was as if she had been hit with a heavy electrical jolt. Then she became still, turned out of the cottage and went down to the sand. She sat beside the beached whaler, staring out to sea.

Shayne squatted beside her, picked tiny shells from the sand, flicked them with a thumbnail. Borger had moved out into calf-deep water. He sat, lay back, let the roll of the water wash over his body. He sat up, took off the head sweatband, squeezed water from it. Finally he looked at the girl again.

All she said was, "If there is such wealth, where is it? I know of two accounts in the bank in town."

"Los Angeles, San Francisco, Salt Lake City. One account each," said Borger. "Omaha. Two in Toronto and—"

"All right!" She cut him off.



Then she said, "And you think father was hiding something inside the *Mary Jane* this morning?"

"Not something, Kris," Borger said flatly. "A large bag or possibly packages of heroin."

"Why should I believe you?"

Borger shrugged.

"Both of you could be members of this so-called mob, just trying to—to . . ."

She stopped suddenly, picked up a handful of sand, threw it into the wind. The wind carried it back over her. She ducked her head and sputtered. "Oh, I don't know!"

"You can pack and return to

New York, Kris," Shayne said.

She squared her shoulders. "And never be sure about any of this?"

Borger came out of the water. He looked as if he had made another decision. "I can't put you in jeopardy, Kris. We'll figure another way."

"Get lost, both of you!"

Borger shot Shayne a glance. The detective flagged the agent up onto the sand, away from the girl.

"Cut," Shayne growled. "She has to have time to think things through. Jog on down the beach. Coming in this morning, I saw a bar about a half mile beyond the motel entrance from the highway. I'll hang my hat there for a couple of hours. You can keep an eye on the cove from down the beach. I'll cover the highway."

"She's not buying, Shayne."

"She's already purchased, Borger. The only thing that has her hung at the moment is her father's role. But she's going to accept within the hour. Because she's going to go out to the *Mary Jane*, just as soon as you and I disappear. And when she comes up with the heroin, she will have accepted totally."

The agent shuffled in the sand, shot a couple of glances toward the girl. He was dubious. "I don't like it. I don't have a good feeling."

He looked around. "What if someone is watching us, waiting for us to make a move? What if she brings the stuff in and someone is waiting for her up there behind the cottage? Then where are we?"

"A sniper worked his way in and out of the growth around this place unnoticed. Can't a federal agent?" Shayne countered.

Borger's jaw tightened before he said flatly, "See you."

Shayne stood for a few seconds watching the young man jog off down the beach. He turned to Kris Tate. "Be careful diving alone out there, doll."

"I can take care of myself," she said without looking at him.

He went up the grassy incline on long strides, slowed as he walked around the cottage to the parked Buick. A small, top-down sports car was braked beside the Buick and Edward Tardorff, the town banker, was unfolding from it. Tardorff pushed the door of the car shut with a flip of his hand and looked straight at Shayne without moving. His face was blank, but his eyes were bright and filled with curiosity.

Shayne leaned a hip against a fender of the Buick, his mind suddenly filled with the memory of a photograph of himself and a blasted apartment door.

"Tardorff," he managed, unable to curb totally the edge in his voice.

"Mr. Shayne." The banker nodded. He squinted slightly as if he sensed the animosity. "I came to see if I might be of any help to Miss Tate," he said.

"She's down at the beach. I think she wants to be alone."

Tardorff nodded. "I can understand. This really is a tragedy." He hesitated, then, "Are you returning to Miami?"

"Not much use for a private detective around here now."

"No, I suppose not." Tardorff nodded again, then started to get into the sports car. "Well, if Miss Tate prefers . . ."

He let the words hang, suddenly said, "Forgive me, Mr. Shayne. This may sound a bit callous. However, speed sometimes can be paramount. Has Miss Tate—er . . . Look, Mr. Shayne, I'm a businessman. I deal in money and land. And . . . well, damnit, man, we currently are standing on a very valuable piece of property. Has Miss Tate given any indication what she plans to do with her father's place? I thought, perhaps, she might have."

"You figure she's been thinking about that *today*?" The detective cut in coldly.

Tardorff flushed, moved nervously. "No . . . I suppose

not. However, I thought she might have indicated—"

"She hasn't," Shayne said.

"Yes, well . . ."

"Do you feel anything like a ghoul, Tardorff?"

The banker flushed, dropped into the bucket seat of the sports car. His fingers worked against the steering wheel. Shayne held his ground, staring at the man. Then Tardorff said, "Good day, Mr. Shayne."

Mike Shayne watched the sports car swing around and head down the macadam road. He waited until it had disappeared, then got into the Buick. He wondered if Borger had managed to work his way into Clife Tate's buffer zone and was secreted there, watching. Had Borger caught any of the play with Tardorff?

The detective wheeled to the roadside lounge and sat down at the bar. From this vantage, he had a clear view of the highway through a large window. He ordered cognac and an ice water chaser. Then he settled in and pondered a nagging twist to the entire case.

What if father and daughter had been a team in the mob-drug action? What if father had been receiving and moving along from South America? What if daughter had been a carrier—via modeling assignments—from European points?

What if the rumors Borger had heard were true? What if father and daughter had been preparing to cut the ties with the mob, disappear into some dark corner of the world? Maybe they had figured to take the latest delivery from Rio with them. Maybe the mob *had* wasted Clive Tate.

If true, what would be Kris Tate's next move?

XIII

TOM BORGER PULLED INTO the lounge parking lot and braked. Shayne watched him roll from the tan sedan and move toward the lounge entrance. Borger had changed into faded blue jeans and a loose-fitting pull-over shirt that hung below his waist.

He joined Shayne at the bar. He looked worried. "She brought in a single package from the *Mary Jane*," he said. "She's at the cottage. Something we didn't think about earlier, shamus—if she's being watched, these boys will spot a tail on her, especially you or me. They'll recognize our cars, that power package of yours in particular."

Shayne left the barstool. "Keep an eye on the highway," he snapped. He crossed the lounge and entered a pay booth, called Tim Rourke at the *Daily*

News. He laid out a plan of action.

Rourke replied, "On my way, Mike. Catch you at the truck stop."

Shayne returned to Borger. "I'm going on ahead. You get back to Kris. You shouldn't have left her. Tardorff was at the house when we split earlier."

"What?" Borger peeled from the stool, headed outside on a dog-trot. Shayne caught up with him as he backed the sedan from the parking slot. He leaned against the open car window. "Anyone in particular I watch for at the car wash?"

"Yeah, a large black man called Catseye. One good eye, one glass eye."

"How about your man?"

"He'll be watching for you. He has your description. Get out of the way, Shayne—that girl could be in deep trouble! I knew I didn't like this operation . . .

The words trailed off as Borger peeled rubber leaving the parking lot. Shayne watched him fishtail down the highway and then went to the Buick.

Tim Rourke was at the truck stop when Shayne arrived. His battered sedan was braked out of sight behind some trucks. Shayne left the Buick where it could not be seen from the

highway and returned to the sedan. Rourke had already moved over to the passenger side, where he sat slouched with one knee cocked against the dashboard. Shayne got behind the wheel, saw the key in the ignition switch, dropped the Buick keys in Rourke's lap.

"Do I get filled in now?" Rourke asked.

Shayne settled lower on the seat. He could see the highway coming in from Palmetto Cove. He kept both eyes on the moving traffic as he laid out the case for the newspaperman.

"Whee!" Rourke cried when Shayne finished. Then he asked, "Is Will Gentry in?"

Will Gentry was chief of Miami police and the redhead's friend of long-standing. Shayne shook his head, like a fresh cigaret. "No."

Rourke shot him an oblique glance. "Shouldn't he be? Miami is his territory."

"This is federal all the way, Tim."

"Federal, yeah," Rourke mused, nodding to himself. "You're sure about Borger?"

It was Shayne's turn to shoot the glance.

"Hell, Mike, he and the girl could be cutting a trail with the stuff right this minute," said the newspaperman. "You don't know. Maybe this car wash—Ms. Tjaden stuff is a bunch of

you-know-what to send a private eye chasing ghosts while they disappear in the opposite direction."

"You're a cynic, Rourke." Shayne flashed a brief grin, then added: "I didn't buy Borger until Sheriff Maxwell bent. Maxwell isn't the kind to bend easily. He checked out Borger—or I give up cigarettes and cognac."

"You're sure then," Rourke nodded, hitching himself up in the seat. "So that gets us down to Kris Tate. Is she clean or has she been hoodwinking a lot of folk? Her move."

"Which she's making," Shayne said, sitting up suddenly in the seat, his eyes riveted on the three-quarter ton truck. It rolled past the truck stop.

Rourke was already out of the sedan and leaning in the door. "Keep a sharp eye, Mike. She could be leading you to a trap door."

"Yeah," said Shayne, as the motor of the sedan smoothed out. He drove it around the braked trucks and entered the stream of highway traffic. The three-quarter ton was in sight ahead, four cars separating the vehicles. Shayne shot a glance into the rear-view mirror. The Buick was back there somewhere, but not in sight.

Shayne drove steadily, watch-

ing the traffic. Everyone except Kris Tate in the truck seemed to be in a hurry, diving out into passing lanes to flash on into the city. She cruised at fifty-five, Shayne remaining four to five car lengths behind her. He hadn't spotted a tail.

When they were three miles into the city, he left her, cutting across on side streets and using a quicker route to the car wash. There was a fast-service food drive-in next door to it. The redhead braked in a stall facing the wash and ordered a hamburger and beer. He watched Kris Tate leave the truck in the wash line and enter the public waiting area of the wash.

Shayne inventoried the street. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary. Traffic moved steadily. There were parked cars here and there, but all were empty. No one appeared to be keeping an eye on the wash. Down at the far intersection a white-helmeted city crew was working on a traffic signal, their two small trucks flashing yellow dome caution lights.

Shayne looked for his Buick, didn't spot it. He breathed easier. Rourke was supposed to disappear with the Buick, keep it out of the area. That was the whole idea. But Shayne also knew Rourke. The veteran newspaperman was a blood-

hound when it came to a big news story. And Rourke had been sniffing hard at the truck stop.

Shayne surveyed the car wash layout again as he munched his hamburger. There was a high fence at the back of the lot, trash barrels lining it. He had a clear view. When the garbage truck wheeled in and left with its cargo, he'd trail it to the garage across the city.

He turned his attention to the car exit line. The vehicles were wheeled outside to sunshine, wiped down a second time, then an attendant held open a door for the departing driver who had already paid inside.

Shayne suddenly became rooted as the three-quarter ton truck appeared. It shot out of the car wash and bounced into the street traffic, leaving a wet trail and forcing the traffic line to stand abruptly on tilted ends like spilling dominoes.

Mike Shayne pitched his hamburger and knocked the tray from the car door with his left hand while his right was switching on the car ignition. He roared back out of the slot with the clatter of the tray loud in his ears. He shot around the end of the parking area, jumped a curb and bounced across the car wash lot, sliding the sedan into the traffic lane hole. He

cut to the inside land and roared ahead.

A parked car loomed in front of him, but the sidewalk was clear. He turned up over the curbing again, got the sedan under control and he sailed along the walk. Then he turned back into the street and cut out to a temporarily clear left lane of traffic. He risked a look in the rear-view mirror for an alert patrol cop.

Nothing showed.

Except for just an instant—he thought he saw Tim Rourke legging it down a sidewalk!

The three-quarter ton truck was in sight now, moving fast. Shayne keyed in on it. Kris Tate was at the wheel and looked alone. But Shayne knew she was in trouble.

No one had bothered to wipe down the truck—or had held a door open for her while she paid and departed from the wash.

XIV

THE TRUCK ROLLED ALONG a heavily traveled street for almost thirteen miles and then suddenly curved off through a small shopping area. Shayne curled through the area and eased on the accelerator. Distance between the two vehicles widened quickly. They had entered a residential zone.

The detective's problem was abruptly two-fold. There were now two heads looming in the rear window of the truck cab, one fashioned in an Afro haircut—and his position as a tail had become obvious. There were no other cars on the street as they sailed on into a posh neighborhood.

Shayne made a U-turn and shot back to the shopping area. He spotted a public phone booth and dived into it. He thumbed the book quickly, found the address for Gretchen Tjaden. Then he grabbed a startled citizen, asked for directions to the street. The man stabbed air, said nothing.

Shayne rolled in the sedan back down the street he had been traveling, finally spotted the turn-off. He eased into it. There were no other cars and the homes were walled and spaced far apart. He cruised along until he spotted the black script letters on a white wall beside a closed car gate. The letters spelled *Gretchen Tjaden*.

He eased past the black wrought-iron gates and turned into the next side street, braked at the curbing. The white wall loomed to his right. The gates had looked unmanned, but he had a hunch entry to the grounds through them would not go unannounced.

He left the sedan and moved

along the sidewalk and white wall, estimating where he was in relation to the house. Nothing moved on the street. There were no pedestrians in the early evening light.

He leaped up suddenly, catching the top of the wall with his fingertips. He hoisted himself and then lay flat on the wall-top, waiting for startled shouts from somewhere. No sound reached him. He looked down the inside of the wall. There was small palms down there. He dropped in behind the growth and remained motionless. The evening stayed quiet.

The house lay dead ahead, perhaps thirty-five yards away. He was on line with a front corner. A large stone patio stretched to the back of the house. It was dotted with brilliantly colored tables, umbrellas and wire chairs. A series of French doors opened on to the patio, but all of the doors were closed and curtained.

Far to the back of the house was a swimming pool area. To the front was a horseshoe-shaped drive. The three-quarter ton truck was the only vehicle in sight. It was braked directly in front of what had to be the front door.

Shayne debated. He needed darkness. But darkness was two hours away. If he went to the swimming pool area, com-

ing in, from the rear of the house, he could be spotted by domestics in the kitchen. If he went to the front and walked in, he was opening himself to everything to his right and left.

Dead ahead seemed the best bet in spite of the open area between himself and the French doors. It was a question of whether or not those inside the house were using the room behind the French doors. If they were not, it was clear sailing. If they were . . .

He steeled himself, walked out into the open and moved on long strides toward the house. He wanted to run, but forced himself to walk. Then he was plastered against the side of the house and sucking deep breaths. He was out of line of the doors now, standing on a corner of the patio. He waited for his breathing to calm. He had made the right selection.

He went to a French door, opened it. No lock resisted. He stepped into a large, richly furnished room, closed the door. Air-conditioned cool swept over him. He stood without moving, his hands still on the knob behind him. The house was dim and silent.

He moved silently on thick carpeting across the room to an open archway. He looked across a hall and into another large, richly-appointed room. The

ont door was to his right, a airway to his left. The house remained silent.

He frowned. Someone had to be somewhere. He went up the airway cautiously, keeping a sharp eye above. Nothing moved. And then he was in an upstairs hallway and looking down over a bannister. A uniformed maid appeared from under him, moved into the room with the French doors. He backed slightly, listened hard. Nothing. His scowl deepened.

He looked up and down the hall. It was long, reminded him of a hotel. Closed polished doors dotted the walls. He moved head, out of the open area. He listened hard at each door. Nothing. He turned, becameooted. A large black man stood about five yards down the hallway. He had one good eye, one glass eye. And he held a shotgun firmly in both hands. The barrel was pointed at Shayne's middle.

The black man grinned. "Hi, Shayne."

"Hi, Catseye."

"You're dead this time, man."

Shayne kicked his feet out in front of him and went down hard on his spine. The roar of the shotgun blast filled his ears and he felt the warm whisk of the pellets inches above his face as he yanked out the .45 and shot blindly down the hall.

He heard a startled howl as he rolled on the carpeting. Something hard landed on his shoulders. He cried out and flipped in the opposite direction. Then he was sitting up, the .45 pointed, trigger finger just a fraction from squeezing off a second shot.

It wasn't needed.

The shotgun lay beside him on the carpet, tossed away by the black man, who was now reeling away from him, doubled up and stumbling. Catseye went down. He shuddered all over, groaned and suddenly was silent, the red of his blood turning brown as the stain spread under him.

Shayne leaped to his feet, then spun like a top with the blur of movement far down the hallway. The sound of another shot filled his ears. He heard a slug smack into a wall behind him. Then, pressed against a door and sighting down the hallway, he had a half-profile of Edward Tardorff in sight. He brought up the .45, but Tardorff disappeared.

Shayne leaped over the prone Catseye and pounded down the hallway. Tardorff suddenly appeared in a door again, looking frightened, but the gun in his hand was level. Shayne triggered a shot into the banker's kneecap. Tardorff screeched and went into a spin. He went

down hard at the detective's feet, his gun still clutched in his fist. Shayne kicked the gun out of his hand and leaped into the room.

He froze at the sight. A powdered and obviously pampered woman of sixty-to seventy years—looking cool in grey and lace—sat on the front edge of a wing-chair in a corner. She was bright-eyed and tight-lipped. On one side of her on the carpeting was a wrapped package. On the other Kris Tate sat at her knees, staring bug-eyed at the detective. There was a thin wire around Kris Tate's neck and the woman in the chair gave a little twist to the wire for emphasis.

"Obviously, Mr. Shayne," she said coolly, "my world is suddenly crumbling around me. However, I do hold two trump cards—my accumulated wealth which will take me far—and this garrote."

She yanked the wire slightly, forcing Kris Tate to gurgle and come up on her fingertips.

"You will now put down the gun, Mr. Shayne—and you, my dear, will get to your feet."

Shayne put the .45 on the carpet as Gretchen Tjaden stood. Kris Tate, gagging and clutching at the wire, came up with her. Gretchen Tjaden went to a telephone, said, "I summon reinforcements."

She picked up the receiver and Kris Tate shot an elbow into her middle. The woman doubled up with a gasp, the phone receiver flying. Shayne leaped in behind Tjaden, caught her wrist and prevented her from twisting it. Kris Tate unwound herself from the garrote as Shayne held the evil lady.

The detective returned her to the wing-chair and sat her in it, towering over her. She was breathing hard as she stared up defiantly at him for several seconds. Then she slumped.

"All right," she said. "What can they do with an old woman in prison?"

Noise sounded from downstairs. It was if a disorganized army had landed. Shayne swept up his .45, handed it to Kris Tate. She stood hefting the gun in her right hand while she rubbed her neck with her left hand.

Mike Shayne went to the balcony railing, looked over it. The hallway below was cluttered with men in city work-crew uniforms. They looked like the men who had been working on a traffic signal near a car wash earlier in the afternoon. And in the middle of the glut were Tom Borger and Tim Rourke, looking like leaders seeking a sense of direction.

"Hey!" Shayne yelled.

The noise subsided. Borger

and Rourke came up the stairway carefully, was as if they were waiting for the detective to tell them they were moving in the right direction. They stopped on the top step, eyed the two sprawled men in the hallway. Tardorff was hanging onto his shattered knee, screaming. Catseye was beginning to stir.

"He's not in the best of shape," Shayne said, indicating the black man.

"Rogers!" Borger called over the bannister. "Get an ambulance out here!"

Shayne ushered them into

the room where Gretchen Tjaden sat waiting quietly and Kris Tate continued to massage her neck. Shayne pointed to the package on the carpeting at Gretchen Tjaden's feet.

"I think you've got your big kill, Borger."

Borger said nothing.

On the other side of the room, Tim Rourke stood inches from Kris Tate and stroked her neck with soft fingertips. "I think I have just the right kind of ointment for that kind of injury..."

Shayne thought he sounded like a tomcat on the prowl.

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CONCRETE EVIDENCE by CRAIG WEEDEN

THE BOTTLE OF WINE

Jock could not bear the idea of losing—but in the final drawing, the cost of victory was high.

by LAWRENCE TREAT

IT WAS INEVITABLE that they should clash, Jock and Horace. Of our wild mushroom group, Horace was probably the only one with the knowledge and background to call himself a mycologist. He should have been the leader, but Jock dominated him, as he dominated everyone.

He had charisma, an easy, natural charm that flowed from every pore. Reckless, happy, endowed with blond good looks and the light blue eyes that went with them, he seemed to play in luck and live in luck. His whole life style was based on taking chances. Only he would dare pick up an unfamil-

iar mushroom and taste it, and never suffer. Luck or a cast iron stomach—I was never sure which.

Brenda was as unlikely a wife as he could have picked. She was quiet to his restlessness, slow to his quickness, serious to his gaiety. And yet, when he approached her, I saw her dark, liquid eyes light up in joy. And he loved her, too. Make no mistake about that.

We usually met of a Sunday morning at Wentworth Corners. The station wagons and minibuses and the polyglot group of cars would line up, ready to follow the lead car to the area where we were to hunt.

Horace always decided where. He knew the country, knew every tree under which a morel grew, every field where the meadow mushrooms proliferated, every pine grove where



the coral mushrooms poked fingers up through thick beds of needles.

We usually fanned out more or less to cover the area, but a small coterie always followed Horace. He had an eye for mushrooms, he seemed to gravitate towards them, and he'd pick one up and give a short lecture on it. Then he'd jot down the name on a list he carried with him, so that at the end of the day he could tot up the number of species we'd found.



After he'd satisfied himself as to the identity of a species, he'd nod to himself and put the mushroom in the basket he carried. It was divided into small partitions, so that various types of fungi could be kept separate and not contaminate each other. Inevitably, as he put one in its proper place, someone would say, "Is it edible?"

Horace would jerk his head as if the question were almost impertinent. "Eh?" he'd say, realizing that scientific identification was not the only purpose we had. "Eh? Oh, yes. Very good to eat." Or of course, at other times he'd shake his head and say, "No, no. Don't."

Brenda usually followed Horace, but Jock would rarely stay within hearing distance of him. Wisdom was not Jock's dish. He'd go dashing through the woods, he'd climb a tree, ford a brook, and incidentally find a mushroom and hold it up and call out, "Hey, look! Delicious!"

Then he'd swallow it, and if anybody asked him what kind it was, he'd say, Who knows? It looked nice."

But he was certainly no fool. He knew enough to stay away from the amanitas and from most of the others the books warned you against.

As often happens with a project like ours it became too

popular. The group became unwieldy. To sift out some of the less dedicated, we decided to try concentrated weekend forays. The numbers dropped, and those of us who were among the faithful got to know each other better.

Horace was no longer the arbiter of exactly where to go. To be sure, he studied up on a region, found out which was good mushroom territory and then he recommended it, but that was where his hegemony ended.

We were usually a quartet of cars on those weekends, with an upper limit of twenty people, and we'd be driving along until Jock stopped. He might be in the first car, he might be in one of the others—but when he stopped, everybody did the same. He had that kind of magnetism.

When we gathered around him he'd say, "Hey, looks like a good place," and off he'd go. Sometimes he struck a payload, and sometimes not.

We had no particular system of operation. We'd follow a path or not follow a path. We'd walk in single file, or we'd spread out. But when anyone found either an unusual mushroom or an edible one, he'd stop and shout for Horace. Horace knew. Horace had the answers.

He was a stocky man with a fringe of beard. He moved

slowly and meticulously, and he weighed every word he spoke, as if the wrong one might mean disaster. He carried a magnifying glass on a string suspended from his neck. If a mushroom was either interesting or unusual, he'd examine it carefully, sniff at it once or twice, perhaps slice it open to study its inner texture. Then he'd utter his ukase.

"Amanita brunnescens."

Or perhaps he'd merely glance at one of the more easily recognizable mushrooms and name it at once.

"Craterellus Cornucopioides," he might say.

Jock, on the outskirts of the group would say lightly, "Horn of plenty. Good to eat, isn't it?"

Horace would nod and remark that the French called it Trumpet of Death. Whereupon somebody would ask why anything so good to eat had such a sombre name, and Horace would explain patiently.

"It got the name," he would say, "because it is so delicious that people claimed it would trumpet up the dead and bring them back to life."

Brenda's dark eyes would shift from Jock to Horace and then back to Jock, as if appraising them, as if caught in a trap and undecided which way to go. But there was no way.

The first time I became

aware of what was going on was one day when we were eating lunch. We'd brought sandwiches and were sitting down in an open glade near a beech grove. Horace, characteristically, had to check the area before starting to eat. With him, mushrooms came first, food later.

He'd found something or other, Cortinarius purpurascens, I think, and it had an unusually lovely violet color. "Brenda," he said. "Look at this." She arose instantly.

I don't think Horace realized that he'd singled her out; I don't think Jock gave it any importance, but I noticed the way her eyes flashed as she stood up. When I looked at her, I thought she blushed. Then Horace was showing her what he'd found.

"Come here, Brenda, I want to share this with you." The words were left unsaid, but Brenda, so sensitive, so richly intuitive in her instincts, heard them with an inner ear.

Around that time Irv and Evie Holstein switched hobbies and got into wine.

They had been to Europe on a wine tour and were intrigued with the subject. They spoke of oenology. They kept explaining that wine must breathe, they spoke of its body and dryness and acidity and fruitiness, and

of the characteristics of the various types of grape.

At first we laughed at them. But after they'd brought along a few bottles for us to taste and told us something about them—"Cheap, too," they kept saying. Eighteen dollars a case!"—we all became interested. Besides, what can mycophiles do when the snow's on the ground? They can go in for wine, and we did.

All of us had pretty good palates. We'd been drawn to wild mushrooms because the taste can be so much more delicate and interesting than that single, commercial variety of *Agarica bispora*. We were micophages and gourmets under the skin, and we turned our attention to wine.

Jock had the idea. "Let's get together and talk this over," he said. "A good dinner somewhere, with an interesting wine. Gourmet stuff, the bunch of us. Hey, how about a banquet once a month?"

We all went for the idea, estimated the price, and set up an informal club. We figured the cost might run as high as twenty-five per person. A few dropped out because they couldn't afford it, but sixteen of us signed up.

I could see Horace cringe. Twenty-five a month was a lot for him, but nobody seemed to

realize it except Brenda, who gave him an anxious look. When he nodded and said certainly, he could manage, she took a deep breath and seemed to relax.

Naturally, Horace was delegated to find the restaurant. He was the workhorse, the reliable. Jock flashed with ideas, Horace slogged them out. It was so ordained.

On our next outing, Horace reported on his choice. "The Lafite, on Cooper Street," he said. "They have good food and know how to prepare it, and Monsieur Jules, he comes from Brooklyn—that was the only time I can recall Horace speaking lightly, with a touch of sarcasm—"Monsieur Jules has an excellent cellar; I'm sure we couldn't do better.

"I spoke to him at some length and he said that, since we were serious mycologists, he'd give us wine at cost. I went over the figures with him and he agreed to average out prices so that it will come to sixteen-fifty apiece."

"Cut-rate Horace," Jock said grinning. "Can we sell him some wild mushrooms, too?"

"I thought of that," Horace replied, "but he's afraid. He says there are too many possible allergies to risk putting them on the menu. Brenda, for instance, can't eat a bolete."

"And how did you find that out?" Jock said. And what he meant by that, I wasn't sure.

Whether Jules was really from Brooklyn or not, he was quite a character. To his clients, he spoke with a finely honed, Parisian accent, but with us he was natural. He came to like us, and during summer and fall we brought him wild mushrooms, which he cooked for himself.

When we gave him a large enough supply, he prepared them for us, and he dried, preserved, pickled and puréed them to serve us during the long winter months when we couldn't go foraging.

He knew his wines, too. He'd always give us the genealogy, along with an anecdote or two, of whatever wine he had for us. I suspect that he lost money on us.

Occasionally I dropped in at the Lafite for lunch. It was the sort of place where you could bring customers and show off a bit.

"A nice little place, you'll like it. Not too many people know about it, but Jules, he's the proprietor, happens to be a friend of mine. And if you want to go there some evening and find out what good wines really taste like, Jules will show you."

I made a point of introducing my customers to Jules, and he

played his role to the hilt, accent and all. A smart man, Jules. And after that publicity, he's famous. Or at least, notorious.

I probably set the stage with a perfectly innocent question. While all of us were having a drink just before one of our banquets, Jules was explaining how he happened to have a quality wine, *grand cru* classification, at a price that he could afford to serve to us.

"I came across it about ten years ago, when I was in France," he said, "and I grabbed all I could get. It doesn't have the chateau label, otherwise it would command several times the price. But they over-produced that particular year and the quantity they can sell is restricted, so I bought all I could without the pedigree. It's about ready to drink now.

"It may not be the greatest wine in the world, but—" and here came a typical Jules understatement—"I think you'll like it."

"If it isn't the greatest in the world," I said, "then what is?"

Jules pondered the question. "It's hard to say. You take the wines of Vosne-Romanée and the four or five acres of Romanée-Conti," he said. "Or a great Bordeaux, like La Tache or Chateau Lafite Rothschild, which I named this place

after—the sixty-ones will run well above a hundred dollars a bottle, and you can't buy better."

"You haven't answered my question," I said.

"It so happens," Jules said, and his eyes grew dreamy, "that I once tasted the greatest wine in the world. You can't buy it and very few people have even drunk it. It comes from what I'll call the Chateau l'Aiglon. Not many people know its real name, except European royalty, of course."

We were hooked by then, and we waited for Jules to smile, as if he was in a trance. "My car had broken down on a by-road in France," he continued, "I'm no mechanic, and I was staring at it helplessly when a car came along, one of the luxury Citroens. The driver saw I was in trouble and he stopped and asked me if he could help. I said that if he brought me to the nearest garage, I'd be grateful.

"He told me to get in, and we started talking. Somehow the conversation got onto wines and I told him I was here to buy what I could for my restaurant. He asked me why I'd come to this district, Bordeaux, and I said I'd finished my business and I was just wandering along the Dordogne, and looking when my car broke down.

"Looking for what?" he asked.

"I don't know why I answered as I did. It was partly the truth and partly something that just occurred to me, something that I maybe realized for the first time. 'I have a dream,' I said. 'I'm looking for the perfect wine. For the best in the whole world.'

"I don't know," I said. "I was on the way to the Médoc area, expecting to stay at some country inn—you never know what you'll find,—when my car broke down."

"Then," he said, "do me the honor of being my guest for dinner. I'd like you to taste rather a good wine." And that," Jules ended, "was how I happened to taste the greatest in the world."

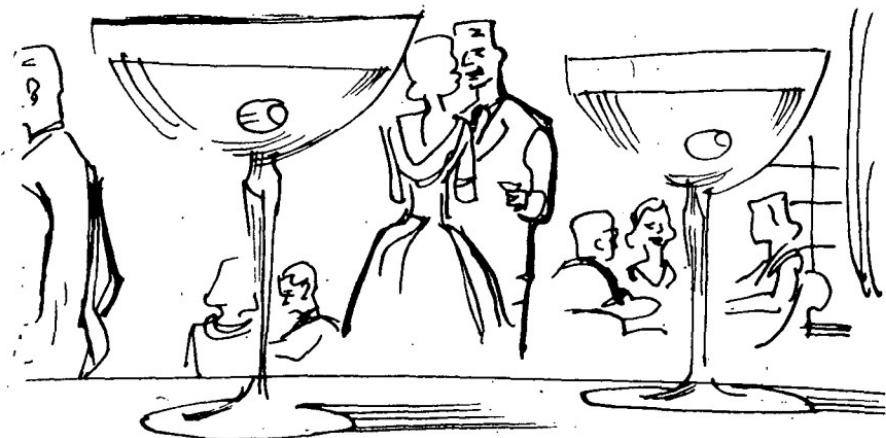
"Just like *that*?" I said.

"I didn't know it at the time," Jules said, "but the count, who picked me up, sells to two of the royal families, and only two. The rest of the output he and his family drink themselves, or else give to a few fortunate friends. When they do sell, I think the price runs about a thousand dollars a bottle."

"I'll buy one," Jock said promptly.

Jules laughed. "Impossible. I just told you—"

"I know what you told us,



and I don't mean that I expect to go over and see the guy and buy a bottle. Although I might. I'm pretty good at persuading. What I meant was—a bunch like us, we're special, we're the mushroom fanciers, the mycophiles.

"Jules, we have the palates and you have the means. You're going to write this guy a letter and explain who we are and why we have the qualifications and the right to buy one bottle. Just one, for a thousand."

"I suppose I could try," Jules said. "But what good would one bottle be, for sixteen people? Good wine is not just a sip or a taste. Most people don't realize it, but wine is made to be drunk. At least a couple of glasses. A full glass, or nothing." And the way he said it,

his words were a proclamation that we repeated later on. Give me liberty or give me death! Give me a full glass or give me nothing!

"It comes to sixty-two dollars and fifty cents each," Horace said in his careful, considered tones. "We could draw lots, and the winner could have the whole bottle."

"Nonsense," Jock said. "That's too simple. You don't raffle off a thousand-dollar bottle of wine like a turkey. The count would never sell on those terms. We have to dress the thing up, give it style."

"Like a tontine," Horace said. "And what's that?" Jock demanded.

"A tontine," Horace said, "is usually a sum of money subscribed to by a group and held in trust until there is a single

survivor, who then obtains the entire amount."

"You mean that the last survivor of us would get to drink the bottle?" I said.

"He'd be too old to enjoy it," Jock said. "I say live it up while we can. Set up a kind of tontine, say with a ten year span. Each year some of us drop out by lot, and ten years from now the winner takes all."

"Mathematically," Horace said, "we could eliminate one person the first year, two the next, then one and then two, and so on until just one was left."

"Me!" Jock said, as if it was settled.

But we were excited, and we spent the rest of the evening making plans. The sixteen of us would still meet in our usual way, but once a year, when the lots were drawn, we'd set up tables, one for the lucky, the other for the unlucky. And so on until the final day, when the winner would sit alone on a kind of throne. He'd have the right to drink his Chateau l'Aiglon by himself, or with a selected guest.

I can see it now. I can see Horace and Jock on that last day, staring at each other across a small table, with the bottle of wine resting in its wicker holder, ready to serve. Jules standing between them,

holding a hat with two pieces of folded paper in it, waiting for the draw.

The proper etiquette would be for the winner to offer to share the bottle with the loser. The loser would refuse graciously, the winner would insist, and, just as the crown was offered three times to Caesar, the loser would finally accept.

But not with a pair like Horace and Jock.

It should have been two others, in which case I would have written a different story and the press would have devoted a mere squib to it. They'd heard of our tontine, and a couple of reporters and a camera man were present at the final drawing. We hadn't wanted the publicity, but word got out and three pressmen showed up and Jules brought them in.

A strange man, Jules. I was always suspicious of him, but never knew what to suspect. He loved his role of Mine Host and he loved to tell stories. And if he embellished them a bit, what of it?

But I'm ahead of myself. The years slid by, and every March we went through our appointed ritual. It seemed to me that Jules had struck up an alliance with fate and was blindly carrying out its design, for he was

the central character in a central spot.

He'd seen Brenda come there for lunch with Horace, he knew what was happening. I know that Jock often had lunch here, too. Sometimes he was alone, in which case Jules sat down with him as a favored customer and they had long talks.

That, however, occurred later and subsequent to the memorable evening when Jules walked into our little banquet carrying a bottle, as he always did. As always, a couple of waiters brought another dozen. If nothing else, Jules was generous and adhered to his principle: Wine should be drunk, there should always be enough of it.

This time, however, he didn't make his usual lecture about the evening's wine. Instead, he made an announcement. "I need a thousand dollars," he said. "Then the wine will be shipped."

We yelled, we shouted. We congratulated Jules and hailed his triumph, and we made out our checks right then and there. We were jubilant that evening as we ate our pâté maison, nibbled on the last of our partridge bones, and tasted our macedoine of fruit.

The years passed. Once, at one of our outings, I saw Brenda walk hand in hand between Jock and Horace, and on

that day both Jock and Horace were strangely subdued.

The fifth year, Horace gave a small dinner for Jock and Brenda, the Holsteins and myself. It was the first time I'd seen Horace's apartment. Every wall in his three rooms had bookshelves loaded to the ceiling, and the books were in French and German, as well as in English. He had one entire wall of classical records.

He sat us down at a round table and asked us to hold hands for a moment of silence. I looked up once, and Brenda seemed to be crying, but at the end of the minute her eyes were quite dry.

Horace had cooked the dinner, creamed scallops with new potatoes, a salad and a chocolate mousse. The wine was an ordinary California white, but it was chilled to a cold crispness. Everything about that evening bespoke cultural breadth and refinement.

I was at a dinner at Brenda's shortly after that. We had a good deal to drink, and Horace was not present.

Meanwhile we kept up our weekend outings, but some of the fun had gone. There were rarely more than six or eight of us, and the Horace-Jock antagonism was no longer veiled. We were like old grads gathered for a reunion where

the missing overwhelmed those who were present.

Nevertheless the bottle of wine held us together and the banquets continued, but no longer on a monthly basis. They were bi-monthly for a while and then quarterly, and our numbers were reduced. Two of us moved away, one of us died. Thirteen left, and at each session Jules brought up the bottle of Chateau l'Aiglon to show us.

It had no label, since it was not for sale. Through the darkness of the glass we could see, or seem to see, its rich, ruby color. Jules let us bend down before it, one by one, so that we could sniff reverently. The aroma that seeped through the cork was rich and promising, but who am I to preach about wine?

I like the good, three-dollar variety that Jules had advised me to buy at one of the better liquor stores. Sometimes they had it in stock, sometimes not, but when they did it was always excellent.

Gradually the eligibles were whittled down, and we came to seat ourselves in a kind of pecking order, with the lucky ones at one end of the table, and the unlucky at the other end, in the order of their departure from contention.

Brenda was counted out at

the sixth year. Jock and Horace always sat opposite each other and we all felt their hostility. Only Brenda seemed at ease, as if she needed two men, two contrasting types to fill the needs of her rich, feminine self.

Jock would sometimes bait Horace. "What," he once asked Horace, "was the best dinner you ever had?"

Horace pondered the question as if it had great importance, and when he'd decided, he spelt out as exotic a menu as his scholarly mind could envision. Then, knowing that it might be more or less equaled but never topped, he said to Jock, "And yours?"

"Hamburger on a roll, with lots of ketchup," Jock said. "I was hungry." And his laughter swept us all up in a gaiety that none of us really felt. But for that bottle of wine, I think we would have broken up that evening.

I was lucky, and as the ninth year came, there were only three names in the hat—Horace's, Jock's and mine.

We sat there, the three of us, while Jules exhibited the bottle for us to admire. He bowed as he placed it on the table. "Next year," he said, "one of you will drink it."

"Me," Jock said easily. "I'm lucky, everybody knows that. Now you take somebody like

Horace—he works hard, he earns everything he gets, while me—things drop in my lap. Easy come, easy go. Horace, I think it's your turn to pick. Go ahead."

Jules bent down, holding the hat with three folded bits of paper and offering it to Horace. He stroked his sharp little pointed beard and reached out. His hand was steady and so was his voice when he read off the name he'd picked. It was mine.

I got up and went back to the main table. Some of the gang patted my arm as I went by. "Tough luck," they said.

I grinned. "I forgot to kiss the Blarney stone," I said. "Still, think of all the worry I don't have to go through all next year." And I sat down.

We had snails marinero, a crisp, flaky crusted beef Wellington, a fresh salad and small, succulent blueberry tarts. Most of us kept staring at Jock and Horace, sitting there at a table for two propped up on a platform. Jock was talking steadily, smiling, apparently enjoying his food. Horace ate sparingly and kept his eyes on his plate. He knew that we were watching him, and he was self-conscious.

I tried not to look at Brenda. She was suffering, she hated what was happening and she

stayed throughout the dinner only because to leave would have been more embarrassing. When I did glance in her direction, I saw that she ate nothing.

"I have a headache," she said in a low voice. "I shouldn't have come, but—well, I couldn't stay home, could I?"

The following year was our last, and we were all aware that, whatever happened, this group would never meet again. Our good times were over. Friendships were strained, and we drank too many cocktails, and we spoke in bursts, trying hard to be natural but not succeeding. The reporters and a camera man stayed at the rear of the room. They were here to see a spectacle, they were not involved.

I had a nervous stomach, and all that three cocktails did for me was to make me more nervous. Since I had been the last one to be counted out, I sat at the head of the long table for eleven.

The table for two, up on a dais, held a vase of flowers and two red candles. We sat down before Jock and Horace took their places. For the first time, Jock seemed apprehensive, as if the strain had finally gotten to him.

As I sat down, I expected him to make a speech, but he didn't.

Instead, he put his hands in his coat pockets and leaned back while Jules did the honors. He spoke to the press and briefed them on the history of the club and the climax that was to be reached this evening.

"I opened the wine about an hour ago," he said, pointing to it, there in the basket. "One of the gentlemen will pick a name out of the hat. It will be the name of the loser. The winner will then invite whomever he wishes to share the wine with him, and I will pour it. Gentlemen?" He turned and held out the hat, waiting to see who would make the pick.

Horace waited, too, for Jock to reach out and select a name. It was his turn. For perhaps two seconds Jock did not move. Then he took his hand out of his pocket, not too fast, but too fast for Jules to stop him. Jock had a gun, and he lifted it and pointed it at Horace's head, a mere couple of feet away. Then Jock fired.

The sound of the shot, ear-splitting, echoing and reverberating in the low ceilinged room, left us stunned. I heard Brenda utter a kind of whimper, but I didn't dare look at her. As for Horace, he toppled off the platform and lay on the floor, where I could barely see him. I kept staring at Jock, staring at the gun, and I

watched it swing around and aim directly at me.

"You!" Jock said. "Come up here." In a kind of daze, I obeyed.

Jock was no longer nervous, and he spoke with a kind of relief, as if he were proud of what he'd done and glad that it was over.

"If anyone leaves this room or tries to communicate with the outside," he said quietly, "I'll shoot my friend here. He's my hostage. Okay?"

It seemed as if nobody breathed. Jock, three feet away and covering me all too easily, turned slightly.

"Brenda," he said, "I didn't tell you, I didn't want to worry you, but when I went to the doctor's three weeks ago, he told me I didn't have very long to live. Certainly not until next year. So I decided that a dying man had the right to a good bottle of wine, and that I'd better make sure I got it."

He smiled then, pleased with his lightness, pretending to practice the same gaiety in death as he had in life. But there was no real gaiety, and the years of antagonism were finally adding up. He couldn't stand the thought of Horace, the Horace who was always right, ending up with Brenda, too. For Jock was jealous and always had been.

"Brenda," he said in a pleading tone, "I decided to die today, instead of dragging on for a few months longer, and Horace had to go with me. That's okay, isn't it? You understand, don't you?"

She said nothing. Her dark eyes were dilated in horror, but her face was white, bloodless. As if she were unable to bear the pain and agony of having caused all this, she refused to face Jock, and instead kept gazing at me. Jock tried to pass it off.

"Jules," he said, "be my guest—pour the wine and sit down."

Jules picked up the bottle, but instead of pouring it, he suddenly smashed it on the floor, where it shattered and sent up its rich, winy smell.

Jock, no longer interested in me, raised the gun and for a moment, I expected him to shoot Jules. But instead, Jock said, "Oh, well, what's a bottle of wine, anyhow?" Then he turned the gun on himself.

A few months later, I happened to be in France and tried to locate the place that Jules had called the Chateau l'Aiglon. After some difficulty, I told the whole story to a friend of mine who was a noted oenologist and asked him what the real name of the place was.

He was intrigued with the story. "What a coincidence!" he said. "Imagine the rivals ending up like that, the last two!"

"It was no coincidence," I said. "I found out that Jock had bribed Jules to rig the lottery. Jock was determined to get that wine."

"What wine?" my friend said. "There's no such thing as the Chateau l'Aiglon, under that name or any other. It doesn't exist. And that Jules of yours—was he fool enough to think he'd get away with a cock-and-bull story of a thousand-dollar bottle of wine?"

"He's no fool," I said. "He kept the thousand."

But Brenda and I rarely talk about that.



FLANAGAN FADED

Something big and illegal was cooking in the cold of the Madison winter. The only problems plaguing Sergeant Flanagan were the usual ones—who, what, why and above all where and when... .

by CARL HOFFMAN

BUDDY HOLLY SAID, "Boy, it's cold!"

"Funny, you should mention that," I replied. "I was about to say the same thing. The words were on the tip of my tongue. And I mean the *tip*, the very *tip*."

"Boy, it's cold!" Buddy repeated.

It was cold all right. I'd learned it at my mother's knee—Madison gets cold in the wintertime. Not quite as cold as Skagway, Alaska, or International Falls, Minnesota, but still plenty cold enough to send sensible people—and sensible dogs, cats, rats, mice and chickens—scurrying for the nearest hearthside or furnace.

Policemen, of course, are not sensible people.

A case in point—at 8:30 on a night toward the end of January, which meteorologists unanimously agree is the coldest month of the year in the northern hemisphere, twenty-seven year-old Detective Sergeant Dennis Flanagan and his twenty-two year-old partner, Investigator Buddy Holly, were sitting huddled in an unmarked police car parked on a street two blocks from the hulking buildings of the University of Wisconsin.

We were shivering and watching the exits of a three-story brick building, which had once been a fraternity house



but was now a student co-op and commune, for the perfectly non-sensible reason that a half-hour before a short fat guy wearing an olive green arctic parka and a long plaid muffler had gone inside.

We were waiting for him to come back out again and continue about his business, because we wanted, non-sensibly, to see where that business took him.

It was a night any sensible person would have been home with a good book or a bad girl or a good slug of heated brandy.

"Boy, it's cold!" Buddy said for the third time. "What's this guy's name again? I keep forgetting."

I sighed. Buddy was sometimes a goof-off, more often a slow learner. But because I was partial to him, and because his father was chief of the Madison Police Department, I said patiently one more time, "Andrew Rucker is his name."

"Yeah, right," Buddy said. "Now I remember."

What I didn't bother to tell Buddy one more time was *why* we were following Rucker, though maybe I should have so he could keep it straight in his mind. I didn't tell Buddy we were following Rucker because Rucker was a dealer, and more—because Rucker had friends in Chicago and Mil-

waukee that we wouldn't like here in Madison.

The kind of friends who would organize the drug traffic. The kind who would penetrate other businesses and industries in town. I didn't bother to tell Buddy that those fears were mostly for the future, however, for what would happen five years from now, and that the main reason we were following Rucker tonight was that a friend of mine had told me Rucker was supposed to pick up a shipment of cocaine sometime this week.

In any case, I doubt that not telling him again really mattered. Buddy's lack of enthusiasm about police matters was always impressive.

"Here comes Jimmy," I said.

Our associate, Officer Jimmy Bell, emerged from the co-op building and plowed toward us through the wind and snow, his breath swirling up around his stocking cap and condensing on his blond beard.

Jimmy is six feet of human weapon. He knows karate. He has muscles to make Muhammad Ali jealous. He's the best pistol shot on the Madison police force, and for three years running he's held the record for the most arrests by a patrolman. He's the toughest uniformed man in the department, and he had been pulled off reg-

ular duty for the express purpose of helping Buddy and me on this assignment.

Jimmy's weakness is that he's all instincts and reflexes. He thinks like a brick wall.

He opened the car door, exposing us to the icy blast, and climbed inside.

"What happened?" I asked.

"He went upstairs as soon as he got there. Taking dope orders, likely. I didn't try to find out exactly who he's seeing because he might've spotted me. Too many blind hallways in a place like that. So I waited in the lobby. Nice lobby they've got there. Color TV and kids studying and a fire—"

"Fire?" Buddy groaned.

"He'll be out soon. I saw him coming downstairs."

"There he is now," I said. "We'll give him a head start to wherever he's going. Then it's my turn."

It was Rucker all right, on the co-op steps, squat and stocky in his green parka. He made no sign that he knew we were watching him. He tossed the end of his scarf over his shoulder, lowered his head and turned in the direction of the student Union.

"Flanagan draws this one," I said as I got out of the car.

"We'll be along," Jimmy said.

Inside the car, it was merely freezing—outside, it might have

been the icecap. A thirty-mile-an-hour wind was sweeping directly down the street with not even a tree branch to slow it down, carrying particles of snow finer than sand. They needled my face as I bent into the blast.

What was worse, I had to keep Rucker in sight and myself out of sight, in case he decided to turn around. I stumbled in and out of shadows and doorways and hid behind parked cars. Then he turned into the student Union, and I had to run to catch up before I lost him in the crowd.

It was a typical Wednesday night at the Wisconsin student Union. In other words, people were packed elbow to elbow and beer was running on the floor. It reminded me of my own days at school, of why I was still in a college town.

A drunk staggered up and grabbed my arm. "You're Rick Jordan, aren't you? Glad to meet you, Rick."

"Well, to tell the truth—" I replied. Rucker was disappearing into the *Rathskeller* arch. I was afraid he'd get away.

"You mean you aren't Rick Jordan?" the drunk asked. His breath smelled like the Schlitz plant in Milwaukee at high noon.

"Right on the second try," I said, disengaging my arm.

"And I just spotted a friend." I ran.

I could have saved myself the trouble. By the time I got there, Rucker was settled comfortably in a booth, pouring from a pitcher of beer.

I ordered *Seven Up* and sat down, watching. It was interesting. Andrew Rucker was a popular fellow. In the first fifteen minutes, three people strolled over to visit him. Two of them didn't even sit down, merely stopped to say hello and share a joke, but the third was different.

He was slight and black-haired and sported an immense handlebar moustache, and he planted himself in the booth opposite Rucker and talked to him long and seriously for ten minutes or more. I could tell they were very good friends.

About then Jimmy Bell showed up, droplets of snow melting in his beard. "We saw you come inside but it took a while to find you," he explained.

"Where's Buddy?"

"In the lobby watching the doors in case someone gets past us. I had to let him come in and get warm. What's fat-boy doing?"

"Talking to people. You recognize anyone?"

He scanned the crowd. "Not more than the usual small tim-

ers. Possession, disorderly conduct, stuff like that."

"How about the little guy over there?" I pointed out the fellow who had talked to Rucker.

"Nope. Don't know him."

He bought hot coffee from a machine and went to an empty table. We sat patiently waiting. Rucker continued drinking beer with a look of satisfaction on his chubby face.

THEN SOMEONE NEW came into the *Rathskeller*. Jimmy and I both spotted him at once. The newcomer was big as a linebacker, and he moved with all the grace of an M-60 tank. His face was pitted with acne scars and he was wearing a woolen leisure suit and carrying a tailored overcoat folded on his arm. Among the work-shirts and bluejeans worn by the students in the *Rathskeller*, this outfit made him no more conspicuous than a hippie at a high class cocktail party. He had a broad, meaty face, familiar as the leaflets on the squadroom wall, a face which seemed especially designed to be framed by numbers and descriptions and catalogues of past exploits.

I glanced over at Jimmy, and he nodded.

The newcomer, the king-size Linebacker, ignored Andrew



Rucker. In fact, he ignored everyone. He sat down quietly at a table in the corner and drank beer from a pitcher and puffed cigarette smoke toward the ceiling and gazed out the windows at the lights winking across the frozen surface of Lake Mendota.

Andrew Rucker got up from his table and went to the lavatory. On the way back he brushed by the table where the Linebacker was sitting. The big man in the leisure suit conveniently managed to knock a pen off the tabletop just as Rucker was passing. Rucker stopped to pick it up.

"You dropped this," he said, loud enough for me to hear, even though I was several yards away.

"Thanks," the Linebacker replied. "Care for a beer?"

"Sure." Andrew Rucker sat down.

They talked for at least a quarter hour, but I couldn't hear them any more because

now they were being careful not to broadcast their lines. But it was obviously an absorbing conversation, for they both forgot about their beer. They let it turn flat in the pitcher. It was enough to make me think they weren't interested in beer at all.

At last, Rucker got up and shook hands with the Linebacker. "Thanks," I heard him say, and he went back to his original table. The big man in the leisure suit drained his glass of stale brew and immediately stood up to go.

I nodded to Jimmy Bell, and he followed the Linebacker out of the *Rathskeller*. Rucker, for his part, downed almost a whole fresh pitcher of beer before deciding to leave himself.

I followed him to the lobby, where Buddy Holly was still covering the exits. "Stay behind him," I instructed.

Rucker zipped up his parka, adjusted his muffler, and bulled

out into the cold. I stayed abreast of him on the opposite side of the street and Buddy kept directly behind. Rucker pushed on, head down, not looking left or right. He was heading straight for the huge complex of highrise dormitories at the southeast corner of the campus. When he got there I followed him into the lobby of a woman's dorm more than ten stories tall. Buddy lounged nonchalantly near the entryway.

Rucker was then talking animatedly on the intra-building phone on the far wall. This close, I could see he had a pleasant face, even though he could lose fifty or so pounds and never miss them. He looked like an elf, roly-poly and curly-haired, with a nose spattered by freckles.

He finished on the phone and walked over to the elevator, and I followed. The doors opened and the two of us got inside. Rucker turned, grinning. "What floor?"

"Twelve." The dorm was twelve stories high. Rucker had eleven chances to get off before I did. He pushed my button, and punched ten for himself. I could feel relief flooding through me.

Still grinning, he asked, "Going to see a girl?"

"Yup." I tried to sound bored,

as though I wasn't interested in the conversation.

"What's her name? I know a lot of the girls up on the twelfth floor." His eyes were positively twinkling now.

"Eleanor Fitts," I growled.

"That's funny," he said. "I don't know her. And I know most of those girls. Maybe she just moved in."

I said nothing. The elevator stopped at the eighth floor but no one got on.

"Are you surprising Eleanor?" Rucker asked cheerfully. "I didn't see you phoning anyone in the lobby."

"She knows I'm coming," I said sullenly.

"That's good," he replied. "They're pretty touchy about unescorted men in this place. If you don't have a girl with you, you better watch out. You'll get quartered."

We stopped at the tenth floor. He stepped outside and held the doors open, grinning at me. "By the way, Officer Flanagan, I'm going to be spending the night here with a friend. So you might as well knock off until tomorrow."

He waved pleasantly as the doors rolled shut.

I got off on the twelfth floor just as two girls wearing bathrobes and towels around their heads came marching down the hall.

Rucker hadn't been kidding. I barely escaped with my life.

"IT WAS BOUND TO HAPPEN," Buddy Holly said. "After all, we've been following him for four days now."

"Could be you're right," I said. "But that's not the part that bothers me. What bothers me is that he knew my name. Where'd he find *that* out?"

"Search me." It was Buddy's stock answer.

We were driving back to headquarters. We had spent the last two hours making sure Rucker told the truth when he said he was spending the night with his girlfriend. Now it was one a.m., the dorm's doors were locked and he would have to pass a security guard to get out before daylight. I didn't think he'd try.

"Boy, it's cold!" Buddy remarked.

We were back where we started from.

Jimmy Bell was waiting in the squadroom, reading from a file folder, his booted feet on the desk.

"How'd you make out with Dick Butkus?" I asked.

"Who?"

"The Linebacker. The guy in the leisure suit."

"Oh—easy. I followed him back to the Wisconsin House Hotel. No fooling around. He

went right upstairs. I talked to the guy at the desk. He didn't want to say anything until I showed him a picture of Abraham Lincoln. Then he wanted to see another one, so I showed him my badge instead. That turned the trick."

"Sometimes it works," I said.

"The guy's in Room 205 under the name Gerald Seaman. Been there since yesterday. Registered Sheboygan as his home town. I'll believe that the day Wisconsin beats Ohio State. Apparently he came in at the same time as the guy next door in Room 207, Arnold Wagner, also of Sheboygan. I got their license number, too."

"Who does it belong to?"

"You won't believe it. Arnold Schwartzendruber of Milwaukee. Nicknamed 'The Weaver'. A famous hardguy with a big family. Suspected of two murders, armed robbery, the usual. That's the one in 207."

"Schwartzendruber? Who's the guy we saw?"

"Him I made right off in the Union. He was getting his picture in all the papers a few months ago. Jerry Van Pelt, also of Milwaukee. I've just been looking at his file. He's got a longer record than his partner."

"Van Pelt?" I said. "Oh yeah. I knew I'd seen him someplace

before. The last I heard he was in trouble with the rest of the boys. Something about money, if I remember correctly."

"Right on," Jimmy said. "He was running a little betting place in Milwaukee with an accountant and somebody decided it wasn't taking in as much money as it ought to."

"Or that Van Pelt and his man were skimming."

"Right. One thing led to another. Van Pelt's accountant ended up in the harbor and they pulled Van Pelt in front of a grand jury. That's when he got his picture spread around. For awhile there it looked like he was going to take a swim too, but I guess he didn't."

"I guess not. Maybe he's out here proving himself. Setting up a good sound operation that'll make a lot of money and satisfy his superiors back in Milwaukee."

"Anyhow," Jimmy said, "I hung around in the Wisconsin House lobby until about a half hour ago. No show. I even went outside and checked their room windows. Lights out. The boys go to bed early."

"Do you figure what I figure?"

"Yup." He paused. "Oh yeah, Denny—one more thing. You had a phone call while you were out. The guy wouldn't give his name. He said you'd

now who it was. Said he wants to see you tonight. He'll be in the usual place on State Street till closing."

That's the guy who got us into this," I said, looking at the wall clock. "Forty minutes. No problem."

"What should I do?" Buddy asked.

"Tell Jimmy what we did. And listen to him. You might learn something."

He looked disappointed. He wanted me to send him home. When your father's the police chief and you're a bad cop, you start thinking that way.

Our usual place was the Vine on State Street. By the time I got there it was 1:30, the wind had died, the revelers had all departed and the floodlit Capitol dome hovered in the still frozen air above the city like an icy winter moon.

Two or three drunks were all that were left in the Vine, along with the sleepy middle-aged bartender. From the back, I could hear the clatter and chime of a single pinball machine, as Harry the Snitch waged his unending war with the little silver ball.

He looked up as I came in. I asked, "Have I told you there's pinball machines in Nevada that actually pay money?"

"I heard of them, man. I'm just biding my time. One of

these days, I'm going out there to make my fortune. Turn professional. Harry the Pinball King."

"You get too good and they'll run you out," I said. "The wise guys own Nevada, you know. They don't want some hick from Wisconsin draining off all the profits."

"I get *that* good, man, they'll probably pay me *not* to play the machines. I ain't greedy, I'd be satisfied with fifteen, twenty thousand a year. So long as I stay single, you understand. But I ain't planning to get married too soon, so the guys can rest easy."

"They'll be relieved to hear that. What was it you wanted to talk about?"

"Correct me if I'm wrong and all that stuff, but the way I hear it, you been following somebody all over town lately."

"Where'd you get that information, Harry?"

"On the street, man. I put my ear on the sidewalk and I could hear the rumbling, like the Indians. Also I remember, the last time you and I had a drink we talked about this particular individual and how he was supposed to be on the receiving end of a big bag from South America pretty soon. And since that's the guy you're supposed to be following, I put two and two together."

"You'll make a great detective someday."

"Won't I? But not till I'm done with my pinball career. Anyhow, if you're still following that individual—"

"Rucker's the one you mean."

"—if you're still following him, you're wasting your time. I just wanted to let you know. He ain't getting no cocaine, not this week, not this year."

"How do you *know* that?"

"He's got a friend, you know, a little guy with a big mustache. Feisty little son of a gun, mean as one of them famous Wisconsin badgers. Caryl's his name."

"I think I know him," I said. "His name's really Caryl?"

"That's the only name I ever heard him use. Guess I'd be pretty mean myself with a name like that. Anyhow, Caryl likes to talk, and he likes to drink too. Matter of fact, he likes drinking and talking at the same time.

"Happened that last night I ran into him when he was in one of his talking and drinking moods. Told me all about how some cop named Finnegan or Shanahan or something is making a fool out of himself running all over town tracking this friend of his. No names mentioned, of course, but I knew he meant Rucker, for the reasons I said before.

"So I made noises like I'd be interested in hearing what was going on, and he laughed and said this Danagan and another big blond dick had the idea that his friend was getting a shipment of cocaine pretty soon, and they were chasing him all across campus and Miffland and Capitol Square. And weren't they a couple sucker because it was all strictly a set-up."

"For what?"

"He was kind of hush-hush about that, but after awhile I began putting stuff together. Seems his pal—meaning Rucker—knows some guys from Milwaukee that have some big dangerous deal coming down here in town pretty soon. What the deal is I couldn't make out, he was playing secret agent.

"But Rucker does favors for these guys sometimes, and they were paying him to take off some of the heat by decoying the law. That's what all the big noise was last week about a load of cola, Rucker spreading rumors about himself. The hardguys are even letting themselves be seen talking to him once in a while to make it look authentic."

"Hold it, that doesn't make sense," I said. "If they do that, they'd just be calling attention to themselves. What if we put a tail on one of the hardguys?

What about next time they want to pull something?"

"Nobody said it, Denny, but I had the impression that whatever this deal is, it's a one-shotter. And that first thing that's what's so smart. Because Rucker knew he was gonna be tailed, right, and he's already spotted you. So if you start following these wiseguys around they'll know who you are and slap you with harassment and you won't be able to go near them."

"That's a little more logical, I told him.

"But that ain't all. It develops that Caryl himself is in on the real operation, the big one the guys from Milwaukee are interested in, and he's going over to the Wisconsin House Hotel tomorrow, meaning this morning. Complicated huh?"

"My head's spinning. But I don't know what I'd believe some drunk. By the way, did he say how Rucker got my name?"

"Nope. But you ain't exactly unknown around town. There's lots of ways he could have found out. Anyway, I'm like you—I didn't buy it either, at least until today. But I got to thinking about you, about your reputation—"

"I'm touched."

"—so I didn't have anything to do anyhow and I went over

to the Library this morning, across the street from the Wisconsin House."

"And you found yourself a good book and sat reading it by a window."

"Right. And who goes in but Caryl. And who comes out a half hour later with a big guy in an overcoat but Caryl. And that's when I started thinking that maybe it wasn't just bull he was feeding me in that bar last night. Maybe it ain't completely our master Buddha's truth, but you'd still probably want to know about it."

"I appreciate it, Harry. You've earned your money today." I reached in my pocket.

"Hold it, man, I ain't done yet," he said. "You think this is good, the best is yet to come."

"You're a regular Walter Cronkite tonight," I said.

"You know Lucky's Liquor Store, just a block or two from here? A little place run by an old guy?"

"And it sells out everytime Wisconsin wins a home game? Yeah, I know the place."

"Caryl's short of cash until the big deal comes down."

"And he's picking up some extra? He told you *that*?"

"Caryl's got a big mouth, like I said. But he didn't tell me exactly, no. Not in so many words. He just sat there staring out the window at it all the

time he was talking, and said he didn't have enough bread to make the rest next week. And I remembered the only other time he got hauled in was for knocking over a liquor store on University a couple years ago. Just to make sure, I did some more nosing around."

"And confirmed it?"

"Yup. His friends talk as much as he does."

"So you figure he'll try it sometime this week?"

"That's the way it adds up, man."

"Now that's interesting," I said. I took out my wallet, removed two tens, and put them on the pinball machine. "Have a game on me."

Harry was trying to finesse the ball through a red-lit gate. "Answer me a question, Denny. Where do you get all this money? Expense account?"

"I'm a single guy," I explained. "They pay me too much as it is, so I feel obligated to spread it around. You're one of the people I hold in particularly high regard."

"Lucky fellow I am." He slapped the machine one more time. The ball dropped through the gate, and a thump sounded from deep inside the scoreboard. He had won a free game. "Always said I was a lucky fellow."

I went back downtown.

I said, "something'shappening, there's no doubt about *that*. The question is, what? And what do we do about it?"

"You've managed to mess it up pretty good already," Leo Peterson growled. "Gettin' spotted like that the first night out."

"It wasn't the first night, it was the fourth," I pointed out mildly, patiently.

"First night, fourth night, you still got spotted."

Leo Peterson was a squat locomotive of a cop with a complexion like an overripe tomato. I was being patient with Lieutenant Peterson because he was my boss. I was being patient with him because at heart I knew he was a delightful human being. When he was in a good mood he had the gentle disposition of a wounded rhinoceros.

Tonight, however, he was not in a good mood.

"What do you think you can do now?" he demanded. "And don't ask me for any more men, because I haven't got any."

"I thought you were going to say that," I said.

"Let me tell you somethin', Flannagan. You're a twenty-seven year-old detective sergeant. You're the first twenty-seven year-old detective sergeant there ever was in this town. And do you know why?"

"Yes," I replied, but I knew he'd ignore me.

"Because of me. Because I thought you were so smart and tough that I went to bat for you. And I made a lot of enemies doin' it. There were a lot of good men that got passed over because of you. Some of 'em were even friends of mine."

"But most of them weren't." I knew he'd ignore me again.

"So that's how you got your job, Sergeant Flanagan."

"I'm aware of that," I said. "It's never left my mind."

"That's good. That's real good. Now I've already pulled Bell off regular duty to help you out. I can't do any more without bein' accused of favoritism. And neither of us wants that, do we?"

"No, lieutenant."

"That's good." He smiled, the faintest glint of a smile that barely turned up the corners of his mouth. He said quietly, "Now do you know what you're going to do next?"

"Since we're not going to be getting any more help," I said, "there's only one thing we *can* do. Though I don't like it."

"You don't like it, that's too bad."

"Yes sir," I grinned. "Thanks, Leo."

He snapped, "Don't call me Leo. Ny name is Lee."

And he laughed, a booming

fat man's laugh that filled the entire room.

"TELL ME OFFICER, how is it you're so sure it's tonight?" asked Edgar Mrotek, the 65-year-old night clerk at Lucky's Liquors. "What says he can't show up tomorrow?"

"Like I said, I'm not sure it *is* tonight," I explained for the third time, tonight being the third night we'd staked out Lucky's. "It's just that it clicks that way, especially because tonight's Saturday. We know he needs the money by the first. And Saturday's your big day, right? You take in more money than any other day of the week, right?"

"I dunno about that, officer. We do big business Sundays before the Packer games. Fellows come in for supplies before tuning up their TV sets."

"Football season's been over a month now," I told him.

"I still dunno," Edgar replied. "Seem mighty chancy to me."

"Look, Mr. Mrotek, why don't you just not worry about it? Whatever happens, we'll be right here."

I stepped into the back room and found Jimmy Bell seated in a metal chair that was tipped against the wall. He was reading a *Superman* comic book. Next to him in the corner leaned the five-shot pump-style



Winchester shotgun he had checked out for this assignment.

"Think tonight's the night?" he asked as I came in.

"Let's not talk about it." I told him.

He looked at me quizzically for a moment. Then he asked, "How'd Buddy make out yesterday?"

"Same as the night before. Surprisingly well. Stuck with Rucker right through his circuit, no problem at all. I didn't know the kid had it in him. Or maybe the fat man thinks nobody's tailing him any more, now that we're gone. Whatever it is, Rucker ended up in another girl's dorm room last night. A different one from the first time."

"Ooooh!" Jimmy laughed. "They *love* that fat."

Then it was time for my favorite pastime—waiting. We sat down.

And waited. Seven became eight.

Eight became nine. Customers went in and out. Lucky's was doing a fine business tonight.

Nine became ten. Became eleven. Became twelve. Customers were fewer now.

Twelve became twelve-thirty. I began to get sleepy. I leaned my head back and yawned, an enormous yawn that could have

swallowed a kangaroo if one had tried jumping in my mouth.

Then Jimmy touched my knee.

My senses came alert as if a button had been pushed. Jimmy was already on his feet, reaching for the shotgun.

We could hear voices in the next room.

We could hear Edgar say, "How come you're wearing that mask, mister?"

We could hear a voice answer, "Because it's Hallowe'en, grandpa, and I came for my trick or treats. Empty the cash register." The voice was a young man's voice, cocky and sarcastic.

Edgar asked, "Is that a real gun you got there?"

There was a silence. Then the smart aleck voice said, "One more dumb question and I'll have to get the money myself, grandpa. You know what that means?"

"Yessir, I do. Don't do anything hasty now." There was the sound of coins being tossed on the counter.

"I don't want the dimes, old man," roared the houng voice, "I want the bills! Gimme the lousy bills!"

I grinned. Edgar was giving us plenty of time to get set.

I looked at Jimmy. He looked calmly back at me. I nodded.

He sprang through the door, shotgun leveled.

I followed him. Over his shoulder I could see Edgar Mroteck ducking to the floor behind the cash register. Beyond that I could see the robber, gun in one hand, the other full of money, his features distorted by a nylon stocking mask. It was obvious even so that he sported a huge moustache.

The man in the nylon mask was startled by our entrance and let the money go fluttering to the floor. He turned as if in slow motion, his gun coming up.

"Police!" Jimmy roared.

We had planned all this carefully, mapped it out. Jimmy had to go through the door first. Our reasoning ran thusly—1) a shotgun was better than a pistol in a situation like this—2) Jimmy handled a shotgun better than I did—3) the last thing any armed robber wanted to see was a gigantic snarling cop charging toward him out of the back room.

Besides, this was Jimmy's kind of work. He loved it.

I leaped Edgar's prone body and dodged behind the counter, my .38 pointed at the intruder's chest. In my peripheral vision I could see Jimmy next to the cash register, ready to blow the little man in the nylon mask

clear out to the sidewalk if he made a millimeter's wrong move.

"Police!" Jimmy roared again, though the room was still filled with the sound of his first shout.

The suspect's hand went limp and his gun clattered to the floor. The hand continued its upward motion, slowly, and the other one followed it, until both were high over the head of the man in the nylon mask.

"Spread them out!" roared Jimmy. "On the counter!"

The robber obeyed. Edgar was picking himself off the floor.

I leaned across the cash register and pulled up the stocking mask.

"Caryl!" I said, "what a nice surprise! Sorry you couldn't have come sooner."

He looked me in the eyes and called me a filthy name.

"That wasn't nice," I said.

"Edgar was saying, "I never doubted it was tonight, officer. I never doubted it."

FORTY-FIVE MINUTES later, Caryl and I were blinking at each other in the glare of the four fluorescent tubes lighting the interrogation room.

"Poor Caryl," I sighed. "Ten years is such a long, long time."

"You already said that, cop."

"Such a very long time."

He said nothing. He looked at me stonily.

"Ten years," I sighed.

"Will you shut up?" he yelled.

"Don't get mad," I said. "That never helped anything."

He called me another filthy name.

"Back to that again?" I sighed. "If I were you, I'd be trying to make friends." Secretly I was pleased. We had been together only a few minutes and I was already getting to him. He wasn't nearly as tough as Harry thought.

"Don't try to mess with me cop," he growled. "I ain't making no deals with you."

I ignored him. "One thing we haven't talked about, Caryl. We haven't talked about Waupun."

"I done time before."

"In the county jail, Caryl. Not Waupun. How you beat that other liquor store rap I don't know, but we've got you dead to rights this time. I imagine you'll get to know the joint pretty well."

He glared at me.

"You know what it's like at Waupun?" I asked.

Still he made no reply.

"It's cold," I informed him, "very cold. First you'll sit around Dane County for awhile, then you'll have a trial and go up and freeze in Waupun for years and years. But"—I stood up to call the

guard in the hallway—"since you don't feel like talking, I'll let you start sitting. Get in practice for the coming years. We'll go into that other thing tomorrow or the next day." My hand was on the doorknob and I was being careful not to look at him.

"Hold it," he said abruptly.

I turned slowly, doing my imitation of a man with better things to do than talk.

"What do you want to know?" he asked, and there was almost despair in his tone.

"You're sure you want to talk?" I asked.

"Yeah."

"You'd better be. I don't want to talk to someone that doesn't want to talk to me."

"I'm sure. What do you want to know?"

"Tell me about Jerry Van Pelt."

"Who?"

"Gerald Seaman. The guy staying over at the Wisconsin House."

"Man, I dunno who you're talking about."

"I guess you don't really have anything to say to me after all." I turned to go.

"Come on, man, gimme a break!" There was a note of genuine fear in his voice. "If I knew, I'd tell you."

"Then tell me," I said, and I let my voice get hard and cold

as the ice on Lake Mendota.
"We know you know him."

"Know who? I never heard of
him! I swear it!"

"I've heard a lot of guys
swear that didn't really mean
it," I told him. "Sometimes I lay
awake wondering about their
souls, whether they'll go to hell
for it." I sighed. "So if you don't
know Jerry Van Pelt, maybe
you know Arnold Schwartzen-
druber, aka Arnold Wagner.
Also registered in the Wiscon-
sin House. Maybe you know
Andrew Rucker."

"Yeah, sure," he said eagerly,
"I know Andy. But not that
other one."

"It's about time you knew one
of these guys."

"In fact," he stuttered, "Andy,
Andy and me—" He stopped
dead.

"Andy and you what?"

"He's the guy that set me
up!" he exclaimed.

I said nothing.

"That's it," he said. "It was
him, that lousy snitch. The only
guy I told about Lucky's Liquor
Store. Why didn't I figure this
before. Man, am I dumb!"

I wasn't going to argue with
him about that.

"And Andy's got that big deal
coming down soon, too. Well,
he's had it. I don't have no
morals about him anymore."

"What deal's this?" I asked.

"A cocaine deal. Andy's pick-

ing up a big shipment of snow
sometime this week. Maybe
even tonight."

"Come off it, Caryl, we know
better than that. There's no
coke deal. We want to know
what you were in on."

"I'm in on something?"

"With Jerry Van Pelt."

"Come on, man." He was actu-
ally squirming now. "I told
you, I don't even know him.
Come on."

"Don't fool with me, Caryl."

"I'm not, man. I'm not in on
nothing more than Lucky's. But
if you think Andy doesn't have
a big show laid out, you better
start looking for another job."

I was vaguely puzzled. Caryl
was either a great actor, or he
was telling the truth, at least
what he knew of it. I remarked,
"I hear you like your booze,
Caryl."

"Me? You're crazy. One thing
I never touch is juice."

"That's not what I heard."

"You heard wrong. My old
man was a boozier. Died in a
gutter drinking antifreeze out
of a car radiator. You think I
want to end up like him?"

"You only want to knock over
liquor stores," I said. But I was
worried now. "That'll do it for
now, Caryl. If we want to ask
you anything else, we'll know
where you are."

"How about—?"

"We'll see," I said. I called

the guard. When Caryl had been led out, I went back to the squadroom and found Jimmy Bell chatting with a pair of uniformed men.

I drew him aside. "Have we heard from Buddy tonight?"

"Yeah," Jimmy replied. "I got the report right after you went in there with the little guy. Buddy called in at eight saying he lost Rucker on Capitol Square and was going to Rucker's apartment to try and pick him up again."

"How about the Wisconsin House? Did he try there?"

"No. Just Rucker's apartment. And the fat man hadn't showed up the last time he called in. That was just a little while ago. I talked to him myself."

"Great!" I said. "Best news since Pearl Harbor."

"What's wrong?"

"I get the feeling Caryl wasn't the only guy that was set up tonight. And I've also figured out how Rucker got my name."

We went out into the freezing night.

HARRY LIVED IN a ratty second-floor apartment facing an alley off State Street. To get to it we had to climb a rickety flight of outdoor steps that were covered with ice.

I banged on the door. "Open

up!" I could hear slow moaning rock music coming from inside, and voices laughing, giggling.

Footsteps approached the door. "Who's there?" The voice was Harry's, but it was high-pitched and giggly.

"It's Flanagan! Open up!"

Again I could hear voices through the door. Then Harry called, "I'm sorry, Denny, I can't let you in."

"Why not?"

"Denny, I'm—not dressed."

"Then put some clothes on. I'm not going to like it if you don't let me in."

There was a full minute's silence. Finally the doorknob rattled. Before the door was half-way open I had pushed through, Jimmy shouldering in behind me. Harry stood holding the door, barefoot and shirtless, wearing a pair of bluejeans.

He started to protest.

I cut him off. "Meet Officer Bell—Officer Bell, meet Harry the Snitch."

Harry began to protest again.

"Shut up," I ordered.

He complied.

Jimmy stood against the wall. I strolled casually to the closet door and opened it. No one was hiding there. That left the only other room in the apartment, the kitchen, and under the bed. "Where's your friend?" I asked Harry.

"What friend?"

"Come on, Harry," I said scornfully.

"In the kitchen."

I nodded. Casually I walked over to his bureau and began pulling out the drawers one by one, glancing in each of them.

"Hey!" Harry said. "Hey, ave you got a war—"

"Shut up!" I told him. "I've got so much on you already I don't have to do anything but lead you your rights and take you downtown. Don't forget our history, Harry. It's always with you."

That shut him up.

"What's that funny smell like woodsmoke?" I asked. I ran my hand under the mattress of the unmade bed. "Something been burning in here?"

Harry was silent.

"And what's that towel doing under the door?" I asked. Harry, you surprise me. I didn't know you were so discreet." My hand snagged on something under the mattress, and I pulled out a test tube full of white powder. "Guess I spoke too soon. You aren't so discreet after all."

"Come on, Denny, I—"

"Put that back, you lousy grabber! And get out of here!"

It was a new voice. I turned slowly. Standing in the kitchen doorway was Harry's friend, a curly-haired little blonde who wasn't wearing very many

clothes. Nothing was in her eyes but hate and fear. Nothing was in her hand but a Colt .45 automatic. Pointed at me.

"Get out of here!" she shouted again.

Harry took a step forward. He said soothingly, "He's a cop, baby. Don't go pointing guns at any cops."

"He's got our snow! What we were gonna sell and make a lot of money with! Tell him to put it back!" She was too busy yelling to see Jimmy Bell, who was moving along the wall toward her.

"Calm down, baby," Harry said. "How about giving me the gun?" He extended his hand.

Then Jimmy was on her, knocking her gunhand up toward the ceiling and twisting the .45 out of her fingers. She swung at him a couple times but he held her at arm's length until she gave up, exhausted and sobbing lightly.

"Lousy pig," she gasped. "Lousy pig!"

Jimmy examined the pistol. "Safety's still on."

"I wish someone'd told me that about a minute ago," I said. I picked one of Harry's shirts off the floor and handed it to the little blonde. "Put this on. What's your name?"

"Julie, cop."

"Julie what?"

She said nothing.

"I bet you're a runaway, Julie. Where're you from?"

"Why should I tell you?" You're just gonna send me home."

I sighed. "I guess we'll have to wait until we get downtown to find out. Why don't you go in the other room and put on some of your own clothes and then come back out here, Julie?"

"Make me, cop."

"Come on Julie. Now be a good girl."

She whirled angrily and stormed into the kitchen, scooping some clothes off the floor. As she disappeared through the doorway, I deliberately ignored Harry and said to Jimmy Bell, "She looks kind of young, doesn't she? How old would you say? Seventeen?"

"At the most," he replied. "Sixteen, more likely."

"I wonder where that .45 came from? Army surplus?"

"Who knows? But I'll give you odds there's no permit around here."

"Okay," Harry cut in. "You guys've made your point. If you want to know the truth, she's from Manitowoc or some other hick town and she has a lousy homelife. Her mother yells at her all the time. I was just giving her a place to stay until she gets a job and finds an apartment of her own."

"You're too modest, Harry. I

bet you gave her more tha that."

He looked resigned. "What's you after?"

"We got fooled tonigh Harry. Someone named Cary didn't have any big deal in th works. And Andrew Rucke disappeared suddenly, probabl off doing business. We're cops Harry. We don't like bein fooled."

"I can only tell you what hear, right? That's what I did. Nobody said you had to be believ it."

I ignored Harry again. "Rucker had a big deal going didn't he, Jimmy? What was h buying? I forget."

"Cocaine." Jimmy said i slowly.

"Yeah, sure, cocaine." examined the vial in my han more closely. "This is cocaine right?"

"Right."

"I bet this is some kind o payment to Harry from som guy who had a big cocaine dea going. Harry probably did favor for him."

Harry said, "I already asked you. What're you after?"

"Where's Rucker?"

"With that guy from the Wisconsin House."

"Which one?"

"Seaman, I guess. Yeah Seaman."

"Van Pelt," I corrected

"That's his real name. Where's he?"

"I dunno."

"You can do better than that, pal."

"I can't tell you, Denny. I'm not supposed to know, I just found out myself by accident. They'll kill me if they find out I told."

"I doubt it, Harry. Van Pelt—the guy who says his name is Seaman—is having problems himself. But I guarantee you'll be in trouble if you don't tell. There's all that stuff from before, and just look at tonight—Possession of a Controlled Substance, Statutory Rape, Possessin of an Unregistered Firearm, Contributing to the Delinquency of a Minor—"

"You broke into my apartment."

"We were *invited* in. Then we smelled grass, so we made a search. Everything's completely legal."

There was a silence. Then he said sullenly, "Rucker has friends on Washington Avenue who are going away for the weekend." He gave us the address. "I think that's where they took the stuff. I only know because I know the guys that live there, too, and they said Rucker was gonna use the place while they were gone."

"Good boy," I said. "I hope you aren't insulted if we keep



an eye on you for a few hours."

"No," he said dejectedly.

Jimmy was already on the telephone, calling a patrol car to take the two of them downtown. We saw them off and went to find a warrant.

OUR CAR CRUISED SLOWLY down West Washington, in the heart of the student ghetto, as I strained to make out house numbers in the dimness.

"That's it right there," I said.

Jimmy braked until we were barely crawling, and we took a good look at the huge frame house.

"Are they upstairs or downstairs?" Buddy asked.

"Upstairs."

Like all the other houses in the neighborhood, this one had been divided into apartments

and rented piecemeal. A single lamp was visible on the second floor, towards the back, glowing on the wall of the building next door. The shade was down. That was all I could see. Jimmy rounded the corner and parked in the shadow of a tree.

There were five of us in the car, Jimmy and Buddy and myself, along with a two-man plainclothes backup unit I had managed to shake loose from the duty lieutenant for the special occasion. I addressed the troops.

"You fellows"—I indicated the extra men—"take the rear. Jimmy and I go in the front door. Buddy stays downstairs in front in case anybody gets past us. Though I hope that won't happen. Remember we aren't sure how many people are in that house." I was deliberately putting Buddy in the position where he'd do the least harm. He'd already fouled up once tonight by losing Rucker. "Five minutes to get in place."

The two plainclothesmen climbed out of the car. Three minutes later we followed.

The house was quiet as we tiptoed onto its big railed porch. No sound came from the first floor apartment, though a light in the front room was glowing behind the curtains. The door to the apartment upstairs had a large cut-glass window, and I

squinted through into a dark stairwell. I looked once at Jimmy, who was holding a shotgun down by his side, and pressed the bell.

Chimes sounded in the depths of the house.

Nothing happened.

I waited, then tried again.

Nothing happened.

"What's taking those guys?"

Buddy asked from behind us. He was standing in the snow at the foot of the porch steps, and his voice was jarring and loud in the silence.

"Be quiet!" I whispered.

Jimmy whispered back: "Maybe they're sneaking out the back. Want to kick it in?"

"They won't get very far if they try that," I said. "One more time." I rang the bell.

A light came on in the stairwell, another in the ceiling of the porch above our heads. A fat unattractive girl wearing a worn flannel nightgown appeared on the landing at the top of the inside stairs and glared down at us. She was gripping a baseball bat with both hands.

"Who's there?" she shouted angrily. "This better not be a joke."

I gave Jimmy a puzzled glance. We weren't expecting anything like this. "Police!" I shouted. "We have a warrant! Open the door!"

She came partway down the stairs, still clutching the ballbat. "Cops, huh? Let me see your badge."

I opened my wallet and held it up to the window.

She descended the stairs the rest of the way and opened the door a crack. "What is it you want? It happens to be three o'clock in the morning, you know."

"We have a warrant to search your apartment."

"Let me see it."

I handed it to her. She began to read it.

"Do you live here?" I asked.

"She looked up scornfully. "What does it look like?"

"We thought you'd gone away for the weekend."

She snorted. "The only place I've been trying to go is to sleep. I'm a nurse. I've been working midnight to eight at the hospital for the last month, and now I can't sleep at the same time as regular people." She finished reading the warrant.

"You're wasting your time. There isn't any coke here. Not even any grass."

"We'd like to take a look anyway."

"Sure," she said disgustedly. "I don't have anything better to do." She looked Jimmy up and down. "But tell your friend to be careful with that shotgun,

okay? Shotguns make me nervous."

Buddy stayed on the porch. The girl led Jimmy and me upstairs to the apartment, where papers and pillows and clothes were strewn across the floor.

"Sorry the place isn't any cleaner," she said. "I didn't know you were coming."

I glanced around. Jimmy was already going through the other rooms quickly. But at that moment I knew in my heart we'd drawn a blank. There was no sign of Rucker and Van Pelt, even less of a big shipment of snow from South America.

"I suppose you have the house surrounded," the fat girl remarked. "In case I try to escape."

"As a matter of fact, we do," I told her. "But you look like you can take care of yourself."

"Too bad you aren't going to find anything," she said. "And too bad you don't have a warrant to search the place downstairs. A couple of *real* heads live down there. And they're gone for the weekend, too."

I straightened slowly. "There's a light on downstairs."

"Sure. They're letting some friends use the place while they're gone."

"What kind of friends?"

"What do you mean, what kind of friends?"

"What do they look like?"

"I don't know, they're just two guys."

"A short fat one and a big guy like a football player?"

"Well, yeah, now that you mention it. They—"

As the words left her mouth a commotion broke out on the porch, voices and scuffling and running feet.

Then I heard Buddy scream, "Stop! Police!"

Already I was in motion, plunging down the stairs, Jimmy two steps behind. I burst out the door in time to see Buddy sprawling and struggling to get up in the snow at the foot of the porchsteps, and the fleeing figures of Andrew Rucker and Jerry Van Pelt already halfway across Washington toward the house on the other side.

I thought I could see a plastic bag in Van Pelt's hand. Light from the wide-open front door of the downstairs apartment was flooding onto the porch.

Buddy had struggled to his knees now, and he was holding his revolver in both outstretched hands, ready to open fire on the fugitives. In my mind's eye I could see him shooting, missing, and the bullets tearing through walls and windows and into the sleeping bodies of people in their beds in the houses across the street.

"Buddy! Don't shoot!" I yelled.

It was too late. He fired twice in quick succession. There was the snap of the gun, and his hands jerked up in recoil. But for once he was doing something right. His firing position was perfect. The lumbering football player's body of Jerry Van Pelt began to fall just short of the curb on the far side, the plastic bag describing a slow majestic arc toward the pavement.

Buddy was shifting to draw a bead on Rucker, who was just plunging into the darkness across the street. A car tore past, horn blaring, a careening streak of light and noise, the driver's startled face staring at us.

"Don't shoot, Buddy!" I leaped down the steps and pushed him sideways in the snow just as the two plainclothesmen came wallowing through snowdrifts around the side of the house and Jimmy sprinted toward the opposite sidewalk.

Then the entire street seemed to explode in rapid, reverberating gunfire that lit the house-fronts and flickered on the grotesque heaps of plowed snow. This wasn't a pistol, not even a shotgun—it was a semiautomatic carbine in the shadows behind a bush across the street, blazing again and

again until the housefronts echoed the roar of gunfire.

I heard a scream, but I couldn't tell who it came from. I saw Jimmy flop down on the pavement in the middle of the street and begin bellying toward the far side. I lay prone in the snow and returned fire myself.

I rolled to my feet and plunged across the sidewalk to a tree and fired again, joined by the full-throated roar of Jimmy's shotgun. My revolver's hammer clicked on an empty chamber and I began frantically to reload.

But the carbine had stopped. I could hear moaning.

"Jimmy!" I shouted. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah!" he yelled back from across the pavement. "It's Van Pelt that's hit! They got him in the leg!" There was a pause. "Denny, I think we killed that guy with the carbine! Cover me! I'm going to take a look!"

Buddy was crouched at the foot of a tree a few steps from me. The two plainclothesmen had flattened behind a snowbank from which they could cover the street. "Get ready!" I told them.

I saw Jimmy crawl past the moaning Van Pelt and peek around the snowpile.

"Denny!" ye yelled. "They're gone! Nobody's here!"

Two blocks down the street, a car with no lights on screeched around a corner at seventy miles an hour, ran a red light and tore away from us into the darkness.

"AND YOU LET them get away," said Lieutenant Leo Peterson. "After you blasted up a whole neighborhood and shot a prime suspect in the leg."

"Not exactly," I replied.

"Not exactly, huh? We've been gettin' calls since three-thirty this morning from people that say their houses and porches are all full of holes. But I guess they must be wrong. You can explain it. Exactly, of course."

I had the pleasure of standing on Lieutenant Peterson's carpet on a bright new Sunday morning, the dazzling-crystal kind of day that comes only in winter when the crust snow is frozen hard enough to walk on and the frigid air pierces your nostrils like ammonia fumes. Bright yellow sunshine was shafting in his office window, making it an even greater pleasure to be standing there, justifying what I had been doing for the past seven nights.

"For one thing," I said, "we didn't shoot Van Pelt in the leg. Sure, for a few minutes there we thought it was Holly that got him, but Van Pelt claims he

slipped on some ice in the street at the same moment Buddy opened fire. Personally, I think Van Pelt got scared when he heard the shots and hit the pavement to save himself.

"But whatever happened, it was an M-1 slug they pulled out of him, not a .38. And it's a good thing he fell down when he did, both for his sake and ours. Lying in the street like that, the guy with the M-1 could barely see him because of the curb and the snowbank, but five more steps and Van Pelt would've caught that whole M-1 clip in the face.

"If that had happened, we'd have a dead hard guy instead of a witness for the prosecution who's talking about everything he knows. As for letting people get away, only Rucker and the gunman did, in the car that took off after Van Pelt was shot. And Rucker, at least, is going to be picked up the first time he shows his face.

"Bolting was the worst thing he could have done, because it ties him to an attempted murder. Though I imagine he panicked when everybody on both sides of the street opened up at once. Even I was scared for a minute there."

"How about this character Schwartzendruber at the Wisconsin House? Could he have been the guy with the carbine?"

"Nope. Airtight alibi, as expected. He stayed at a night club until two and then sat up in the hotel lobby, reading, until we came to talk to him. He told the night clerk he couldn't sleep.

"So the gunman was somebody else, probably a specialist from Milwaukee just in town for the one-evening job, and Schwartzendruber's job was to supervise the hit on Van Pelt but not take any direct part in it himself, like Valachi supervising the Eugenio Giannini murder in 1952."

"And that's what all this was, huh? Just a hit on Van Pelt?"

"We should feel honored, actually. It's the first time anybody's tried anything like this in Madison. At any rate, it wasn't *just* a hit. It got pretty complicated there for awhile."

"I've been waitin' for you to explain all the ins and outs, Mr. Genius."

"I said, "Suppose you know a guy you want to get rid of because he cheated you out of some money. Didn't report all the bread he was taking in at his bookie joint, the money you're supposed to be getting a percentage of.

"But you're afraid to try to kill him because he's threatened to co-operate with the law, and if somebody bungles the job, you yourself might

end up facing an eight or ten year-old murder charge. What would you do?"

"First thing, get him out of town. Second thing, set him up and let him have it."

"Right! So that's what happened. They sent Van Pelt to Madison along with Schwartzen-druber on the excuse that they were supposed to organize the dealers here in town and take in a big shipment of fly. They had an advance man named Andrew Rucker who was hot to make his bones and become a full fledged wiseguy.

"He was the one that put out the word about a cocaine deal, to make Van Pelt believe there actually *was* something important going on. Rucker's mistake was that he overdid it. He told Harry the Snitch, and Harry in turn let me know. And we put a tail on Rucker.

"When Rucker figured it out, he traced it back to Harry and came to him with an offer—he could have some of the coke if he misdirected me by saying Caryl was in on the plot and that we could pick Caryl up in a couple nights at Lucky's Liquors, a job Rucker happened to know Caryl was planning.

"So Harry came to me with that song and dance and we spent the next three evenings sitting at Lucky's while Rucker let himself be tailed by Buddy,

knowing he could lose a single cop a lot easier than three."

"Which brings us to tonight," Lt. Peterson said.

"Correct. Tonight was the night they were going to hit Van Pelt. Rucker was supposed to shake Holly, then pick up the snow from some guy pretending to just be coming up from South America, then pay off Harry for getting Jimmy and me out of the way. Then Rucker and Van Pelt would go to the house on Washington and cut the coke.

"When they were finished, Rucker was supposed to lead Van Pelt outside and let the guy with the carbine take over. Rucker would then call the police and report the murder, saying he didn't see the gunman and had no idea why anybody would want to kill poor Jerry Van Pelt. And that would be the end of that."

"Except it didn't work out."

"They started off fine," I said. "Rucker dodged Buddy with no problem, and they got the plastic bag and went about their business. But then we captured Caryl and fell onto what was going on. And Harry cracked too fast, and what's more, he knew where they were, some information he wasn't supposed to have. Though he still gave them half a break by sending us to the upstairs apartment at

the house rather than the one downstairs, the one they were actually in.

"He anticipated what actually happened, that they'd hear us. From Harry's point of view that was the only thing he could do and still have a chance of satisfying both sides. If we complained, he could say it was just a mistake, just a slip of the tongue, and why were we being so tough with him if he'd sent us to the right house at least?

"On the other hand, if the wiseguys said he'd squealed to the cops, he could always tell them he'd deliberately given us the wrong address to let Rucker and Van Pelt have a chance to escape. Either way, it had a chance of working for him."

"Or of blowing up in his face."

"True. I'm going to see he gets sixty days for *something*. Make sure he understands he can't mess with John Law."

"I think you're askin' for

trouble. I'd throw the book at him."

"You may have a point there. But he's been reliable in the past. I figure he deserves another chance. In any case, we sent his girlfriend back home on the morning bus, and Caryl gets arraigned tomorrow. And they can't shut Van Pelt up. He just keeps on talking."

"One thing I don't believe," Lt. Peterson said, "is that they'd waste all that money for cocaine when it was nothing but a set up."

"Didn't I tell you? It's phony. It's not cola. Not one grain. The chemists tested it this morning."

"Oh?"

We looked at each other for a minute. Lt. Peterson said, "Don't go getting any ideas that you're a real smart guy, because you aren't. Smart, maybe, but not *real* smart."

I smiled. "I appreciate that, Leo."



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JANUARY 1978

FUNERAL IN PEACHVILLE

by

FRANK SISK



"DIFFERENT A STORY"

Stories of madness constitute a venerable and venerated special branch of the mystery fiction tree, on the shady horror side, of course—for human madness is always horrifying, whether in fiction or in grim reality. Running from far back in the last century with Guy de Maupassant's THE HORLA (a horrifying tale, indeed the last the famed French author ever wrote as he was succumbing to paresis when he wrote it) right down through Fredric Brown's DAYMARE, such stories chill their readers in a very special marrow-freezing way. Now here is one of the chilliest (and best) from the gifted typewriter of a master mystery writer.

THEY'S CERTAIN HAPPENINGS in this here life ordained by the Almighty and nothing under the everlasting sun is like to change them.

I point to the case of Jasper Jim Woodsee. Why, as soon as that pert little piece sashayed herself over from Milton County or wherever and took up working in the Colonel's fried-chicken stand Jasper Jim's fate was set and sealed.

They tell in Peachville he was plumb stricken from the start. Every single night for twenty-two nights, they say, Jasper Jim come to that there stand, moony as a milksop callan, and et chicken till he was grease to the ears. Then on the twenty-third night, without so much as a by-your-leave to his folks, he up and marries the gal—runs over to Milton City in the farm pickup and gets a

sleepy j.p. to tie the knot at 2:00 a.m.

Her maiden name was Pomona Perse. On the marriage certificate her age is give as nineteen against Jasper Jim's twenty, and not much more was ever known about her in these parts. If she owned kin anywhere in Milton County (she named Pickens there as place of birth), they nary one of them come forward after the tragedy.

Anyhow, it's said bride and groom spent a short honeymoon in the bed of the pickup. Come daybreak they drove back to Peachville, nervous as doves traipsing through molasses, to deliver the tidings to the other Woodsees, a right clannish bunch as is most of the families hereabouts.

They'll go fur to lend a neighbor a hand but they don't take readily to strangers. So I don't exaggerate even a little bit in saying the Woodsees give the pickup a sight more welcome than they spared for the newlyweds.

The daddy—T.K.—was alive then. Mulish old cuss. Stilled his own corn and much of the time kept himself stoked good with it. Under duress from his wife Amanda and her brother Sam L. Simpkins (the Simpkinses was a heap heavier in the pocketbook than the Woodsees), T. K. turned twenty

of his meanest acres over to Jasper Jim for crop or kill and thenceforth treated the younguns like overlooked dirt as long as he lived.

Which wasn't long.

His briny liver carried him off less than a year later. So the old boy never did lay eyes on his one and only grandson, who come into the world a month after the burial. Knowing T. K.'s narrow nature, this circumstance was a blessing in disguise. For this baby was living and breathing proof that Pomona had a few drops of midnight flowing in her veins.

Leland (so he was christened) weren't black nor white—coffee with heavy cream, more like. With his ma's delicate features too. But where Pomona's hair was wavy black, Leland's was black with a kink to it.

Peachville begun whispering, but Jasper Jim didn't seem to notice nothing wrong. Fact is, he pure loved that boy and bragged on him wheresoever he went about his errands. Peachville snickered behind his back. Miz Amanda tried to put up a good front but it was plain she was heartbroke.

Then, a year later, along come a second child, a gal called Cassie, who was two shades darker than Leland, with hair like steel wool.

This all happen ten years

back when attitudes round here was a mite different from now-days. Just a mite, mind you. A mixed marriage was as good as a capital crime. A body, specially a black one, could be punished for it by masked men.

Even though I'm Chief Bailiff of the County Court and supposed to represent the Powers That Be, I never held with this view. Still, being a public official, I always keep my private opinion to myself. I keep my mouth shet. I do my duty. I butter my bread and eat it.

But my heart bled for what befallen Jasper Jim in the months following the birth of that second baby.

His ma took to bed with a long-drawn-out spell of dol-drums. Sam L. Simpkins, his uncle, offered him forty prime acres and five thousand dollars to boot on the condition he divorce Pomona and send her packing with the whelps to wherever in hell she come from. (Jasper Jim said No without giving the matter a second thought.) His friends begin eyeing him cold or turning their backs altogether. His enemies yelled threats and insults whenever he come into town.

Jasper Jim tried to weather it out, but he had as much chance as a cat in a kennel of rabid dogs. One night parties unknown shot dead his two

mules. Another night they poured tar over all his new-stacked hay. Then a week later they burned down his barn.

Pomona wanted to take the kids and leave.

"No you don't," Jasper Jim said. "Not by a damn site!"

"They going to kill us for sure, hon," Pomona said.

"They going to have to kill me first," Jasper Jim said. "And I ain't like to die easy."

So that's when he started to go armed. Doing his chores, he carried a loaded pistol in his belt. When he drove his old truck into Peachville, there was plain to see a two-barrel shotgun leaning on the seat beside him. He also took to drinking.

T. K. had left behind a considerable quantity of kegged corn. The son resumed where the father quit but with a gusto which would of caused the old man to pop his galluses.

Well, man can't live long as a pariah without losing something, and in Jasper Jim's case it was his mind. Six months after Cassie's birth he was boozing most of the time and jabbering to himself alone out in the fields and shooting at imaginary trespassers.

One morning he put a load of buckshot in the udder of a cow belonging to Henry Purinto, who leased abutting pasture. The critter had to be destroyed.

Henry went to law for damages but it never come to nothing because of what followed.

By this time, they tell, Pomona was as scared of Jasper Jim as she was of the night riders. She was squoze, in my view, between Beelzebub and bigotry and no way out but to git running.

Theys evidence she packed an old valise with a poor scrimption of duds for herself and the young-uns and aimed to trapise in the dark of the moon fifteen or so miles across the border to Milton County. They's further evidence that Jasper Jim weren't a mind to let her do any such thing. Nobody knows exactly what happened that night except Jasper Jim and he ain't never spoke one word about it.

All that's known is what was seen the next morning.

Still clutching the handle of the valise, Pomona lay in the doorway of the shack that passed for home, the upper part of her back blown raw and ragged. Leland was blasted in two a few feet inside. Cassie was found last, out near the charred carcass of the barn, head down in a bucket of water, drowned like a kitten.

Couple of hours later a deputy sheriff found Jasper Jim at the fried-chicken stand. He already et enough of stuff to

founder a hog in rut and nary a damn cent in his pockets to pay for it.

The old truck was there, too, with no more than a quart of gas in the tank, and the shotgun, both barrels discharged, the empty shells still in place.

Jasper Jim never faced a regular trial. A hearing is what he had, following which they buckled him up and tucked him away in the State Hospital for the Criminally Insane. He was the talk of the county for maybe a week and then folks went on to other things and gradually forgot.

Now and again some old-timer, spotting Miz Amanda Woodsee or Sam L. Simpkins in Peachville Center, would whittle away at recollections to a handy listener, but by the end of ten years most of us figgered, if we figgered a little bit, that Jasper Jim was good as dead and buried.

Then come his resurrection, you might say, on the occasion of Miz Amanda's death.

Sam L. Simpkins was naturally in full charge of the funeral arrangements. He declared it fit and proper for all surviving kin, which included Jasper Jim, to show due respect by attending the obsequies. And then through the Powers That Be he wangled a writ of compassionate leave for Jasper

Jim from his place of confinement and I, being Chief Bailiff of the County Court, was delegated to gallivant across half the state to fetch the poor mucker home.

To my best recollection I nary ever been within hog-calling distance of that there hospital. But once foot was set inside its lobby, circular and high-domed and practically empty except for a few wicker chairs and a potted palm, I could of took an oath on the Good Book that I been here erstwhile a-visiting. Maybe that's because so many public buildings don't differ much, specially inside.

A guard in gray uniform guided me to the director's office. We marched side by side, shoulders near to touching, along corridors without carpets, the slap of our shoes echoing with a funny kind of overlap. I half figgered the guard might remark the absence of a weapon on my person and ask the reason why, but he kept as mum as hung mutton.

Times long gone I quit carrying guns. I heard tell that law officers in England don't have no truck with such and they none the worse for wear. So I give them up too and I aint been shot at since. Mind you, though, I been criticized regular for it by Certain Elements. But gun begets gun, in my

view, and I ain't fixing to have no more of that.

The march finally brought us to a white door with neat black lettering:

DR HAROLD E. HIGGS
DIRECTOR

The guard knocked just under the lettering.

A muffled voice seemed to say, "Come in."

Dr Harold E. Higgs stood up from behind a big shiny desk as the guard opened the door. He looked somehow like a man I'd knew all my days. Eyes green and beady behind thick glasses, a long nose as pale as wax, a wide pinkish mouth grinning around a briar pipe, gray chin whiskers come to a devilish point.

His grin took me in as if we was old buddies, but I swear by all accounts our paths was crossing here and now for the first time ever.

He took the pipe from his mouth, without changing that funny grin, and breathed out a small cloud of smoke. "Well, Mister Bailey, here's our man," he said, turning to a figure half-sitting on a windowsill to his right.

Mister Bailey instead of Mister Bailiff. I might of misheard him. Anyhow I let it slide and give my full attention to the

shadow at the window. Shadow I say because the glare of the incoming sunlight made a pure blank of the features. A cardboard cutout couldn't of looked less real.

But judging from size and shape, I note right off that the body appears shorter and stouter than Jasper Jim's—leastwise as I recollect it. Truth to tell, though, I hardly knowed the lad close up and ten years can trick a man's memory.

When he moved off from the window I had another small shock.

Jasper Jim, how I calculate, was suppose to be at this here time roundabout thirty-two-year old. The face coming toward me better belonged to a codger all of fifty—baldish, squinty-eyed, nose turned up like a hog's, dry old lips, loose leathery skin as wrinkled as a mammy's lappet:

God Almighty, I said to myself, what dreadful havoc can befall a body in ten years of confinement? It don't somehow seem justice at all.

"Well, Bailey," the Doctor was saying, "we expect you to return our man to us in good working order forty-eight hours from now. Until then he's all yours."

Bailey again. Again I let it slide. Could be Higgs got a speech block regards the word

bailiff. I hear tell of odder quirks.

I say, "Now don't you fret yourself one little bit, Doc. Since I been Chief Bailiff of the County Court over to Peachville, I nary once misplaced or damaged a body in my custody, and you got my oath I ain't aiming to mar that there record today."

"That is mighty reassuring." Grinning like an all-fired clown, the Doctor sticks that briar pipe back in his mouth. And then he winks one of them beady eyes, a real comical sort of wink, but whether it's for Jasper Jim's benefit or mine I can't rightly tell. "Mighty reassuring, I must say."

Then betwixt a few short puffs of smoke he goes on. "Take my word for it, Mister Bailey, you won't require hand-cuffs or other means of restraint in this case. Our man is a model patient. Always cooperative. The soul, one might say, of institutionalized docility."

Hardly the exact words I'd of used. Fact is, there was something in Jasper Jim's squinty eyes put me in mind of a pit viper fixing to strike.

"Well, I don't carry cuffs nowhow," I say. "Nor neither a gun or a billy."

"No billy, no gun, no cuffs. Well, that suits us just fine."

"I do like they do in England."

"Oh, do you now?"

"Like the bobbies do."

"Of course. A commendable example." The grin on the Doctor's face stretched like elastic. "That being the case, I should say everything appears to be as proper as pork pie. *Ha ha ha.* So cheerio for the nonce."

Higgs returned to his desk chair without offering me a handshake and the three of us left. The guard left the office first, me and Jasper Jim paired close to heel.

About halfway to the lobby, I say in a whisper that carries from one end of the corridor to the other, I say, "That there Doc Higgs is enough to give a body the fantods."

Jasper Jim don't say a word.

The guard neither.

I try again. "From what I seen I'd say the Doc could profit from a smattering of medical attention himself."

Nary a response.

They going to play it with a stiff upper lip, I tell myself, I'll follow suit. Maybe they's a law against talking out loud in these corridors.

At the lobby door the guard, mumbling something, took leave of us.

The sunlight outside bounced off the concrete steps like balls of fire.



Jasper Jim covered his baldish head with a brown straw fedora I hadn't noticed him carrying. It also come to my notice now that he was wearing a brand-new suit of brown denim with pleated pockets and stitching at the edges of the peaked lapels. The latest.

"Man, oh man," I remarked, "old Sam L. got you outfitted right smart for the occasion."

He don't dain to say aye, yes or no. All's he does is hide them squinty eyes behind a pair of dark glasses and look to the county car which is moving toward us from the parking lot.

In the sun's dazzle, I do declare, that black car loomed up as glossy white as spun cotton—like it might of underwent a paint job whilst I was inside the hospital. Another peculiar thing, the deputy sheriff driving it appeared to have underwent a change, too.

He was a whit younger, seemed like, and a good bit thinner and the hair under the John Wayne hat was longer than regulations set down by the Powers That Be.

"Is that you, Alvin?" I asked against the glint of the rolled-up windows.

The man leaned across the passenger seat and cranked that window open a slit. "All set, Chief?"

"What become of Alvin?" I asked.

"You can call me Al if it please."

"Set up front there," Jasper Jim said. "I'll ride in the back."

The deputy sheriff opened both doors. I clumb into the front seat, Jasper Jim into the back. The interior of the car was as cool as a melon on ice but the stink of stale cigar smoke hung heavy in the air. I give up smoking years agone, so I figgered the deputy'd been puffing up a storm in my absence.

"Roll up the window," he was saying, "so the air conditioning

don't have to work overtime."

I did as he said but I give him my two-cents worth. "In the future, Al, I'd be obliged if you did your smoking outside this vehicle. And that's an order."

"I don't hold with profanity neither. Alvin knew that. And Alvin was a teetotal non-smoking Christian gent. Now whatever become of him all of a sudden?"

"Sunstroke," Jasper Jim said.

I turned my head to look at him. "How come you know that I don't?"

"Come to me from the grapevine," he said.

"I've heard tell of such."

"You heard aright."

"Where'd they carry the poor bugger?"

"The infirmary, the officers' infirmary. He'll come along fine there."

"You've took a load offen my mind," I said, then settled back to enjoy the drive.

The sky was a burning blue, with the only clouds far to the west as thin as spider webs. The asphalt road was bound to be soft and hot. Piney woods on either side most of the way. Now and then I'd see a stretch of crape myrtle twined together with oleander and I felt like rolling down the window just enough to have myself a whiff of sweetness.

Jasper Jim nor the deputy wasn't much on palaver. A couple of times I tried to strike up some sociability but they plain didn't take to it.

Then I begin to smell that cigar smoke again, heavier than ever, and I looked over my shoulder and, sure enough, Jasper Jim got a black cheroot smoldering in his face.

Well, sir, I was fixing to lay down the law again, but then I think how rare the poor hog-nosed cuss can pleasure himself, confined like he is by the Powers That Be, and I decide to let him indulge.

About two hours later we pass a sign in hard need of paint.

WEL OME TO PEA HVI LE C NTY

Some welcome!

A spell after that, up come the old W. E. Parton cottonseed-oil mill—four or five sheds sagging against one another and worse off for paint than that county sign. A piece further we go by a red-brick building known in these parts as the Veneer Factory, only it ain't turned out so much as a gill of veneer since Adam skinned an eel.

Drear sights. They sunk my spirits boot deep. Like revelation from the Good Book, I begin to see blight touching

whatsoever I looked at. The azalea bushes, past bloom, struck me as clumps of charred bones.

The clay ditches was red and hot and full of baking toads. Cattle Crick, the color of coffee, ran slow and shallow. The slash pine was skimpy. Big crows roosted on the steamy roofs of dog-trot privies behind doorless hacks of warped clapboard.

Dead rot and the stink of it on all sides. Been creeping across the county for years, I reckon, without me ever taking real notice. It taken a trip away from it and back to open my blinking eyes, and I like to die at what I'm seeing now.

The Woodsee house weren't no exception.

Down the road a distance, it might be the same place it always been. Up close it truly showed its rickety self. It wanted paint. The piazza lacked some strips of flooring. A balustrade had lost its head. Blue-edged cracks ran through the glass of two front windows.

Without wheels, the rusty carcase of a pickup truck squatted in the side yard off the dirty driveway—the same pick-up, I do believe, that Jaspar Jim and Pomona used on their wedding night. And that driveway itself was so cluttered with all make of vehicles that the deputy sheriff was obliged to park

the county car on a patch of weedy lawn.

As we climb out into the dusty heat a small boy appeared behind the front-door screen from which hung a limp black ribbon of mourning. Then the door opened and out come the boy and half a dozen other folks of all shapes and sizes. Some of the faces was in my age bracket but I couldn't place a one. Still, I someway knowed them like most country faces are knowed by ilk.

About then Sam L. Simpkins shoved himself into view and in so doing bumped a couple other mourners off the piazza and down the steps.

He was wearing a stiff suit the color of stove pipe, a wilted white shirt, a black tie a mite wider than a shoe lace and brown boots crisscrossed with the wrinkles of long wear. Himself, he stood up to age a right smart better than his duds—ginger hair speckled with a bit of gray, blue eyes sharp as icicles, long face held stern betwixt two deep wrinkles either side of his evil-got mouth.

I never cotton much to Sam L. and they weren't nothing about his manner now apt to change me over.

"Whyn't you got that pure lunatic locked in irons?" he hol-

lered, coming down off the piazza.

"Take my word on it, Mister Simpkins," I said as polite as could be, "he don't need none. He gentle as a new-born lamb."

"I be a damn boll weevil!" Sam L. stopped dead in his tracks as if he run into a wall.

"Not a speck of harm in him nowdays," I said.

"Well, I be a fiddler's bitch," Sam L. said. "Unless you all loony as he is, you oughten to keep this varmit manacled ever minute. I don't aim to have him making a ruckus here today, Bailey, and that's Gawd's truth."

"It's Bailiff, not Bailey," I said.

"Well, flay my hide," Sam L. said.

Jasper Jim come up beside me and said in a calm voice, "If you don't rile things up yourself, Sam, I think it'll go peaceable enough."

"You can count on it," I said, placing a friendly hand on Jasper Jim's shoulder.

"Well, I be a one-eyed dawg," Sam L. said, shaking his head. "Never thought I'd live to see the day. You all mayst well come in and take some nourishment. This damn heat is right thirsty weather."

The mourners stood back, silent mouths agape, as we followed Sam L. up the piazza

steps and into the house. Inside it was dim compared to outside but nary a bit cooler.

Sam L. led us to the parlor where there was a sickening smell of dying flowers. In the gloom I made out a table set with eatables and an aluminum keg of beer. On the opposite side of the room stood the coffin with three tall candles burning at the head, and at the foot some floral sprays and a big wreath spread with a white ribbon reading *Paradise Is Peace*.

"The barbecue ribs cleaned out," Sam L. was saying.

"I don't much favor ribs when it's this hot," Jasper Jim said.

"But they's a heap of chicken salad and cow peas and what all. And the beer's still cold."

"I reckon a beer'd hit the spot," Jasper Jim said.

"You oughten to pay respects to you ma first," I whispered.

"Soon's I have a swaller of beer."

"Well, all right. But mind you don't lay lip to nothing stronger."

Then, because it seem the proper thing to do, I strolled

over to the coffin for a farewell look at Miz Amanda Woodsee. It been a good many years since I last laid eyes on her. She'd kept a good deal to home after Jasper Jim was put away and whenever I did chance to see her in town it was always from a distance. So when I saw the face in the coffin I dang near drop to my knees in surprise.

It wasn't Miz Amanda's face at all.

Gawd damn, it was the face of my own ma. Yes sir. My own dear ma who passed away when I weren't but a shittail boy.

Yes sir. Yes sir.

Tears come to my eyes. They burn. They blind. I began wailing like a soul in hell. It don't sound seemly but I can't stop.

I feel my hands being cuffed behind my back. Then that no-count deputy sheriff and Jasper Jim—yes sir, Jasper Jim—they got me by the arms and they hurrying me out of the room, and Sam L. is yelling, "I fair warned you, Bailey."

"Bailiff," I cry. "Chief Bailiff of the County Court. You'll answer to the Powers That Be for doing me this way."



A BLACK LEATHER CAP



by HAL ELLSON

Brink's wits were not of the sharpest but, given time, he was able to figure things out . . . like that he was merely a stooge for Ole and Pilot's waterfront theft racket, and an underpaid stooge at that. But even a Brink ultimately reaches a point of no return.

DISMAL CRIES CAME from the harbor and Ole knew the warm air of the false-spring was touching chill water and breeding mist. A good night to work, he thought, and now he noticed the broken sidewalk, the dismal houses dark with the sweat of dampness that crept through this morbid area at night.

A block farther on, he stopped before a bar and gazed at the drinkers within. It was like watching a mirrored pantomime, but when he stepped inside, the raucous voices of barge captains and girls flowed over at him like a flood. Always

the same girls, but with different partners, he thought, and at the bar's far end he spotted Brink and moved toward him.

With his cap off and his long blond hair shrouding his forehead, Brink leaned heavily against the bar, his huge hand gripping a glass. Ole tapped him on the shoulder and he turned, frowning and blinking.

"Hey, you don't know me?" Ole said.

"Sure, I do," Brink replied.

"Good. You alone?"

Shifting the dead cigar in his mouth, Brink nodded, and the barman appeared. Ole nodded

to him, and the barman poured for Brink. Three shots vanished as quickly as they were poured, then Ole placed a hand on Brink's arm.

"All right, let's go, strong man," he said.

"Go where?" Brink mumbled.

"There's a little job to do."

A little job. It was always put that way, as if he didn't know Ole and Pilot gave him the leavings when he did the heavy work. Well, this time they could hang, he thought, and stared blankly at the glass in his hand.

Gently, Ole squeezed his powerful arm. "What's wrong, you don't want to work?" he said.

"Say it. Tell him the facts. But it was always the same. Brink couldn't say what he wanted to say, nor resist Ole's blandishments.

"You don't want to work?" Ole repeated, grinning and shaking his head. "Don't give me that. The money's always good, and you don't have to wait for it. A short haul and a fast buck, what more do you want? Come on."

Brink remained silent, but Ole still grinned and waited. *Gentle the ox and he'd move*, Ole thought, and Brink did. As he pushed himself away from the bar, Ole threw down some change for the drinks, picked

up Brink's black leather cap and they walked to the door. Once outside, Brink flung his cigar away and Ole handed him his cap.

"Ready, strong-man?" he said.

"I'm ready," Brink answered, and they moved off. The air was damper now, the avenue quieter. Ole listened and heard the moans and cries from the harbor that drifted and echoed up through the waterfront streets.

They turned from the avenue into a sloping side-street and a pier-shed loomed up ahead. It was darker and quieter here, a place of echoes and damp with the harbor's breath. Up ahead the blank pier-head loomed larger now.

Turning the corner, they caught the salt-smell of the harbor, saw the black shadows of silent warehouses and, passing them, crossed a cobbled gutter to an open pier. It was damper here, completely dark and, below the planks that muffled their steps, the harbor water lay silent.

A shack stood at the pier-end. They approached it and stopped. Ole pushed open the door and they entered, blinking in the yellow light of an oil-lamp. The shack smelled of old rope, tobacco and smoke.

An old man sat in a chair be-

yond the lamp, a corpse-like figure, his face lined and haggard, his blue eyes misted with age and whiskey. His name was Pilot. He looked up but didn't speak as Ole stooped and lifted a trap-door. Dampness and the smell of the harbor welled up through the opening, while water lapped gently below.

Ole went down the ladder and Brink followed him into the rowboat waiting below. Silently, it glided out of the blackness beneath the pier and into the night. Ole lifted the oars. Water dripped from the blades, the rowboat rose on a gentle swell.

"Where to?" Brink asked.

"Just watch and listen."

Yes, Brink thought, just watch and listen, but do the heavy work and be cheated.

With Ole at the oars, the rowboat moved forward steadily through the dark, lifting and falling on the swells. Mist floated up from the water and the voices of the harbor played tricks. Loud in one moment, they faded in the next, disturbing Brink, who was disturbed enough by the movement of the swells. They made him feel that the rowboat was merely rising and falling in place.

Always, he had this forbidding feeling of being lost and going nowhere on these jobs. Watching the dim form of his partner

moving in steady rhythm with the oars, again he wanted to ask where they were headed, but he knew Ole would never divulge their destination.

A channel-bell sounded its ghostly music, while, portside, a blurred object drifted by. Watching it, Brink wondered if it were a bloated corpse drifting to sea. The fast-running tide carried it off, and the chill mist covered them, then lifted again.

Suddenly Ole raised oars and listened, as if he had heard voices. A loud wail, followed by a shriek, split the silence. Then, far across the harbor, a liner's foghorn boomed.

Ole dipped the oars again and the rowboat moved on. Finally the swells subsided and two enormous shadows reared up, and he made out the bulging hulk of a freighter lying up to a stark-black pier-shed. The rowboat drifted again. Still listening, Ole heard a gentle slapping of water—otherwise there was silence.

Good, he thought as the rowboat drifted between two piers.

There were more shadows here—a small boat rocking soundlessly, the boom of a lighter spearing the night, flat scows and hulking barges asleep in the dark. Ole cocked an ear, heard nothing, dipped oars and the rowboat finally nosed the side of a barge.

Brink raised his eyes, Ole whistled softly and a cargo-door yawned open above. A man appeared, raised a hand, vanished and moments later re-appeared. "Ready?" he said softly.

"All right, strongman." Ole nodded, and Brink stood up. A heavy sack was lowered to his shoulder. He grunted and lowered it into the rowboat. Three more followed, then a fourth and he sat, breathing heavily, wondering what was in the sacks and how much Ole would pay him this time.

The rowboat headed out of the slip. The way back was riskier and always seemed longer. Halfway "home" and deceived by the mist, Ole stopped rowing and whispered, "The Harbor Police."

Drifting, they waited anxiously, but nothing happened. Ole's phantom vanished and once more he dipped oars. When they reached the open pier and moved under it, total darkness closed in on them till Ole whistled. The trap-door opened above them then, light sifted down and Pilot's face appeared. Ole steadied the rowboat, Brink lifted the heavy bags and the old man snagged them with a baling-hook.

Finished, Brink followed Ole up the ladder. The old man was already back in his chair at the table beyond the lamp. He

didn't speak or look up and again Brink saw him as a corpse.

Then Ole tapped his shoulder. "Okay," he said, and handed him his pay for the night's work.

After grabbing it, Brink's consciousness faded. Later he found himself back at the bar, drinking whiskey, half for the chills and half for his anger—for Ole and Pilot had cheated him again. Drink followed drink in quick succession and his anger swelled. Then an arm locked with his own and his name was spoken. Bleary-eyed, he turned and a girl's face came into focus.

"Yeah, Anna," he said.

"Don't give me that stupid stuff," she answered. "Where were you?"

Confused, he shook his head. "No place," he said.

"Bull! As soon as I turned my back, you scooted."

Still confused, he told himself she was lying, and then Anna said, "Who was the girl you sneaked off with?"

Now we was more confused, for there was no girl but Anna persisted. "Which one, Brink?" she said, and his head began to ache.

"It was that greedy bitch Signe, wasn't it?" Anna went on.

Signe? He didn't know that

one. "Let me alone," he mumbled, but she wouldn't. "You got plenty out of me," she went on. "I treated you good. I . . ."

His hand came up the bar with some crumpled bills. "Is this what you're after?" he said, and she stared at the money, then finally said, "Where'd you get it?"

"I don't remember," he answered. "You want it, go ahead and take it."

"From Signe? I wouldn't spit on it."

"I don't know any Signe."

"Oh, no. Every man on the piers knows that one, and she gives you money. Is she working for you?"

Angered, he tried to pull away, but Anna held him. "You've got to tell me," she said.

"I don't remember anything," he answered.

"You mean you don't want to," she said.

The barman cut in. "Let's not get excited," he said to Anna. "Brink left with Ole when you got lost in the ladies' room." That said, the barman turned away, and Anna looked at Brink.

"So that's who it was. That *animal!*" she said and, when Brink remained silent, she reached for the money, counted and threw the bills on the bar. "So, he used you again," she

sneered. "Both of them cheated you."

"Both of them?"

"Ole and my father. They're both rotten."

What was she saying? If she'd only shut up, he thought, his head aching more.

She pulled on his arm. "Come on home with me, you fool. They're closing the joint."

So that was why the light was so dim, he thought, and looked around. The place was almost empty. Anna tugged on his arm and he started for the door.

The mist outside was now a thick white veil, the damp air chill. "Where's your cap?" Anna asked.

"Don't know. Must have lost it," he said.

"You'd lose your damned head if it wasn't on your shoulders," she snapped and pulled him along.

When they reached her place, she tumbled him into bed and turned away. It was then that he remembered his cap, and everything came back, Ole rowing, the boat gliding through the dark, the dead-weight of the sacks on his shoulders, the yellow light sifting down through the trap-door and Pilot's corpse-like face above, the baling-hook gleaming in his hand.

All was clear now, and his

eyes went to Anna. Beyond feeling, he watched her disrobe as if she were a stranger. Naked at last, she reached for the light and saw him smiling.

"What are you grinning about?" she said.

"Just thinking about tonight."

"A fine time for that!" she snapped and doused the light. As the bed sagged under her weight, plain as day, he saw the lamp in the shack on the open pier and beyond the lamp on the other side of the table, the old man slumped in his chair with his mouth agape, but Ole wasn't there.

The yawning trap-door had taken him and he was lying somewhere in the dark chill water below. Would the tide float him out to see, or the eels get to him first? Brink wondered, but one or the other, it didn't matter. Ole was dead and the old man too.

"Both of them," he mumbled, and Anna's face emerged from the dark. "Ah, you're crazy drunk again," she said. Then her lips fastened on his as she clung to him, but he didn't re-

spond, for new images were sharpening into focus in his mind.

Heavy and lethal, he saw the iron bar he'd used and the awful blow that had shattered Ole's skull. It was as clear as when it had happened earlier in that dingy shack on the open pier, and no less clear was the final image, the ghastly look on the upturned face of Anna's father when his turn came to die.

That didn't bother him at all, but the loss of his black cap did. He'd worn it for years and now it was gone. "I've got to find it," he muttered.

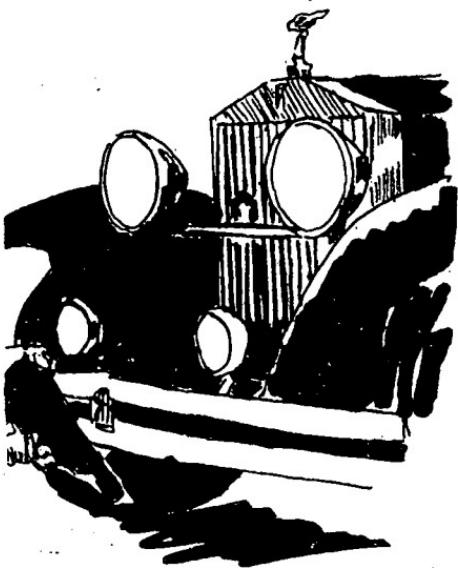
"Oh, shut up. You talk too much," said Anna, biting his lips and silencing him. Locking her in his arms then, he said no more and slept.

It was late the next morning when two detectives knocked on the door. When Anna let them in, they rousted Brink from bed, took him to the shack on the pier-end and showed him his black leather cap. He denied it was his, but his name was on the sweat-band and they pointed that out to him.



A DEATH IN TOPANGA

by
**JACK
NEWORTH**



Old Man Fulton hired Brassler to find his daughter. But he found a corpse instead.

IT WAS MONDAY MORNING and I was going through my mail at the office. I had just gotten back from a weekend vacation in Las Vegas the night before. Some vacation! First they screw up my room reservation, then I drop three months savings at the crap table and, on top of that, Trans Pacific Airlines misplaces my bag on the return flight to L.A.

Some vacation alright—and the mail on my desk wasn't

much better. A throwaway ad for infra-red binoculars (What Every Private Eye Needs For Night Work), the usual bills, including, believe it or not, one from Trans Pacific and a letter from Fulton Construction company. I opened the letter first.

Dear Mr. Brassler: There is a very private matter I would like you to investigate for me. I've enclosed a check for \$250 as a retainer. Please meet me at my

house Monday at 3:00 P.M. to discuss details. If you are unable to make it, phone 232-4141. Respectfully, Alexander Fulton.

Pretty matter of fact I thought to myself. But for two hundred and fifty bucks, who's complaining?

Fulton's house was in a plush section of Pasadena where there are nothing but huge estates. His place had a front lawn bigger than some golf courses. A short, elderly black man answered the door.

"Is Mr. Fulton expecting you, sir?"

Before I could answer, a deep voice from inside the large room echoed over the butler's shoulder. "That's alright, Randolph. Show Mr. Brassler in."

Alexander Fulton was a tall, strongly built man in his late forties, a little grey around the temples, but he looked like a guy who made a point of staying in top shape.

"Can I get you something to drink?" he asked, glancing down at the weird looking concoction he had in his glass. "I'm a bit of a health nut myself, but we must have some liquor around the house."

I declined on the booze and organic junk, and settled for a diet cola. After a little social chit chat we sat down and Fulton proceeded to tell me his

story. It seemed he wanted me to locate his daughter, Sherry, whom he hadn't heard from in months. He said he thought she was living with some drug dealer, a kid named Rick Milligan whom, it was obvious, Fulton, wasn't too crazy about.

Fulton handed me her last letter, and a photo taken before she dropped out of college. I read the letter quickly. Something about how, if Fulton couldn't accept Rick, she couldn't relate to him, and not to try contacting her. And, oh yeah, a short thank-you for \$1500 Fulton had sent her. I looked at the photo—young, blonde, pretty face, with trouble written all over it.

Fulton went on about how, after his wife died he had realized all he had left in life was his daughter, and how important it was to him she be happy and living right. I said I'd do what I could to find her, and left after we shook hands.

As I walked down what must have been a half mile of stone steps to the sidewalk, I noticed there wasn't so much as a blade of grass out of place in the whole joint, except maybe the dirty Rolls Royce sitting in the circular drive. You don't see a dirty Rolls Royce very often, I thought quietly, as I got in my old Buick and headed home, calling it a day.

The next morning, after my shower, which would have been a shave and a shower except for Trans-Pacific Airlines, I set about looking for Sherry Fulton. My only lead was the return address on the letter Fulton had given me, 911 Brooks Avenue, Venice, so that's where I went.

The building was a rundown fourplex right in the heart of the ghetto. Fortunately the landlord was there—it was rent day.

"Sure I remember them," said Benny Udkoff, a thin, wiry joker with a pale complexion and what looked like a perpetual frown on his face. "She acted like she thought she was a regular princess and he was nothing but a bum, a real arrogant punk if you ask me. You ought to see the way they left the place, two bills' worth of damage, maybe more. How can a person make a living with tenants like this?"

I had a hard time feeling too sorry for Udkoff. I mean, figuring L.A. property values these days, the building was probably worth a thousand times what he had paid for it, and didn't seem like he was too interested in keeping it up, anyway. But I listened as he complained some more about Rick Milligan and what he'd do if he ever caught him.

Finally I brought up the subject of a forwarding address and, to my pleasant surprise, Udkoff knew it, a place somewhere in Topanga.

"You know you're not the only one looking for Milligan," he said as he scribbled the address on a piece of my Acme Alarm scratch paper. "People come by all the time. Why last week some guy even called me at my house.

"Can you figure it, the guy must have gone to all the trouble of looking me up at the County Recorder's office or something? Anyway, if you find Milligan, I hope you help put him away" he added, before going eagerly inside to collect his monthly rents.

The Topanga section of Los Angeles, high in the Santa Monica mountains, is unique in that it's a place where hippies, artists, construction workers and real estate developers live in harmony, all thinking they are in the backwoods somewhere. That is, until the smog comes rolling in. For rural atmosphere, there aren't many street signs and only a few paved roads.

Finally I was able to locate Milligan's place, an old two-story cabin halfway up a steep dirt road which must have had a million ruts, all of which I managed to hit. Only when I

pulled up in front, there was a bunch of black-and-white LAPD squad cars and, standing on the rickety porch, Lieutenant Al Brewster of homicide.

"Just what this case needed!" Brewster said as I got out of my car and walked toward the cabin. "Sidney Brassler. What are you doing, Sid, becoming a hippy growing a beard?" obviously making a reference to my two day growth.

"Yeah, I thought I'd start my own religious cult. "Actually, Brewster, I was looking for a kid named Milligan, hoping he could lead me to somebody."

"Well unless this somebody you're looking for lives at the morgue, you're out of luck, Sidney. Milligan was killed Sunday night. And who is it you're looking for?"

"C'mon Al, you know better than that," I said.

"Alright Sid, forget it. Come on in."

As we walked inside the weathered cabin, Brewster told me what they had. "Milligan is a big time coke dealer up here. Narco has been keeping an eye on him, but in these hills it's hard to get a look-see without everybody knowing you're coming.

"Anyway, apparently the kid was going to make a big haul—at least that was the word floating around. We found

him with his head bashed in against that pot-belly stove over there, and about ten gees worth of cocaine on the table. Evidently, the buyer and he got into a hassle, and—bamboo—Milligan becomes part of the fireplace. Narco already has a lead on the buyer, we're just dusting for prints again. Don't touch anything, Sid."

"Oh yeah, sure," I said, looking around for signs of Sherry Fulton, and not seeing any. "What else was here?"

"Nothing much. Some old clothes, papers, a phone bill. Look, if you're interested, come down to the station and you can go through it. Who did you say you're working for?"

He asked it as if he expected an answer as I pushed open the old screen door and we walked outside.

I followed Brewster back to the Venice station, where he let me have a photocopy of Milligan's overdue phone bill, some papers that had been on the desk and a photograph of Milligan and a few friends, one of whom was Sherry Fulton. I tried to be casual as I noticed.

Brewster gave me this in exchange for my promise that I'd give him anything I found out. It didn't seem like much of a bargain for either of us, but it was all I had to go on. I looked over Milligan's phone bill but

didn't see anything there, nothing in the papers either.

"What do you make of this travel brochure?" I asked, glancing down at literature from World Wide Travel.

"We figure Milligan thought he was going to make the big haul and leave the country. That's what these punks all think they're going to do, only they never make it. But Hell, what am I telling you for? By the way, Sidney, before you go, did I mention how great you look in your new beard? Gives you real character.

"Now, if by chance any of my boys pick you up for vagrancy, you just tell them you're a friend of mine. No, on second thought, maybe you better not."

As I walked down the steps of the old Venice Station I thought I would try World Wide Travel on La Cienega. When I got there, the gal behind the counter, a cute dame wearing a button that said *Hi, I'm Sandra* gave me a big, wide smile, except it seemed to disappear when she found out I wasn't planning a trip to Acapulco.

I showed Sandra the picture of Milligan, which she studied for a minute, slowly shaking her head. "No, I don't remember him at all. But this girl here looks very familiar."

She pointed to Sherry Fulton,

added, "I think she came here about a boat trip to Hawaii if I'm not mistaken."

"Can you check your records?"

She hesitated for a moment, said, "I think it was about a month ago when she came in."

By the time I left World Wide, Sandra was almost positive it was Sherry Fulton, and my head was spinning. What did I have?

Brewster and Narco think Milligan was bumped off by a cocaine buyer who, after the kill, forgets to snatch the coke. Hardly likely for my money. My client wants me to find his daughter, who just happens to have vacated the premises clean as a whistle and is conveniently on a cruise to Hawaii. I might find her, but I might find her guilty of murder while I'm doing it.

I figured that when I got back to the office I'd better give Alexander Fulton a call.

As I was dialing Fulton's phone number from my office, something struck me as odd. Of course, with my finances of late, it could have just been the fact that Pasadena was a toll call.

Fulton was shocked to hear Milligan was dead, although he didn't sound too broken up over it. Strangely enough he was very curious about the details,

how it happened, what the Police thought. As for his daughter being involved, he was positive that was impossible.

I explained I just wanted him to know what I had found and not that a boat trip to Hawaii was what I was working on. He seemed encouraged that his daughter hadn't been with Milligan, and we ended our conversation on that note.

I decided to knock off for the day, but before going home I reluctantly stopped off at the Akron on Sunset and bought another of those new battery-operated shavers. In the two months since I bought the one Trans Pacific probably sent to the Aleutian Islands, the price had gone up \$15.

When I arrived at my office the next morning, I got a message from my answering service that World Wide Travel had some information for me. I was about to leave and drive over there when Alexander Fulton walked in. "We're building some condominiums down on Highland, so I thought I'd drop by for a minute. I'm afraid I won't be needing your services any more Mr. Brassler, but I think this should cover your trouble," he said as he handed me a check.

I glanced down at it. It was for another \$250. Did he say

trouble? Fulton continued to talk.

"You see, when you mentioned the possibility of Sherry having gone to Hawaii, I remembered that girlfriend of hers from college moved there a year ago. I was able to get the number, and, sure enough, Sherry is there. That daughter of mine!"

Naturally she was very upset when I told her Rick had been killed by that drug dealer, but she'll get over it. Anyway, as you can see, Brassler, I won't be needing you anymore. But I do want to compliment you on your work."

About a minute after Alexander Fulton left and I was still looking down at the check, noticing it had a high-rise building in the corner as its insignia, the phone rang. With the money I had made in the last few days, I wasn't afraid to answer it.

"Sid, Al Brewster. Enough of this client confidentiality crap—what do you know about Rick Milligan's murder?"

"I thought you had it nailed?"

"We did, until about an hour ago. Narco located the drug buyer, only they located him in the Marina Hospital intensive care unit from a drug overdose. Can't very well kill someone from a hospital bed. So c'mon Sid, I'm waiting."

I paused for a minute. Right off the bat I had a few hunches, but I decided to stall to think things over. "Listen Al, let me do some checking. I'll get back to you, I promise."

As I drove down La Cienega Boulevard toward World Wide Travel, my brain was crammed with a bunch of ideas as to who killed Rick Milligan. I thought about Benny Udkoff, who, all things considered, seemed a lot more upset than just \$200 worth of damage to an already rundown building warranted.

Then there was still Sherry Fulton, disappearing right after the murder. And then Alexander Fulton, who at times seemed more interested in what the Police thought about Milligan's murder than where his daughter was. Nothing was clear, except I was working overtime.

When I got to World Wide I found out right away that Sherry Fulton was in Hawaii as Sandra pulled out the paperwork for her trip. The first thing I noticed was that the boat had sailed out of Pedro six days before Milligan got hit.

"Are you sure of this date?" I asked, hoping for a mistake just to clear the air.

"Of course it's correct. August twenty-second and two p.m. That's when the Lurline sailed for Honolulu. I even have the

ship's register. Wait a minute, here it is. There's her signature." I took out the letter Fulton had given me. The signatures matched perfectly.

Sandra continued to talk. "And here's the Xerox of the check she paid for the trip with. We always make Xerox copies of our deposits, you know," she added as though proud of her efficiency. I looked down at the check, but I couldn't believe my eyes. Finally something had turned up.

"This is how she paid for the trip?" I asked.

"Why yes—is there something wrong?"

"No, Sandy, for a change everything's right. Thanks a lot, sweetheart, you're a lifesaver. If I ever go to Acapulco, I'll see you first, that's a promise."

With that I bolted out of World Wide.

As I continued down La Cienga, everything was beginning to jell. I stopped at a pay phone and called Benny Udkoff.

"Mr. Udkoff, you know that phone call you got at your house asking for Rick Milligan. Did you give the caller the new address?"

"Sure I did. The guy sounded like a bill collector, so why not?"

I hung up as Udkoff was still going on about Rick Milligan being an arrogant punk and

drove to the Venice Police Station.

Al Brewster was sitting behind his desk, his head cupped between his hands, looking down at pieces of evidence. As I walked in he raised his eyes up at me with a hopeful stare.

"Al, I can't guarantee it, but I think I've got something you're going to be interested in." I sat down in Brewster's crummy chair with no arms, and began to tell him what I had. "You wanted to know who I was working for, okay. Are you familiar with the name Alexander Fulton?"

"Sure the construction guy. Hey, wait a minute, wasn't his number on Milligan's—"

"I'm getting to that" I interrupted. "You see, on Monday Fulton hires me to look for his missing daughter, Sherry Fulton. Says he's been worried because she's living with Milligan. Remember the girl in the picture with Milligan and his friends, that was her!"

Brewster was fidgeting in his chair. "You mean you knew all the time you didn't say a word? Christ, Sidney, I should run your—"

"Look Al, I didn't know what it meant then. That's why I kept quiet. One thing, I never thought it was any drug killing. Not with ten grand worth of coke sitting on the table. In

fact, for a while there I thought your murderer was the missing Sherry Fulton. Only I find out that Sherry Fulton went to Hawaii about a week before the murder.

"But get this—who do you think paid for the trip? None other than Alexander Fulton with his own check, the same Fulton who supposedly hasn't heard from his daughter in two months."

Brewster was scratching his head. "So that's what Fulton's phone number was doing on Milligan's bill! When we tracked down the numbers, we thought maybe Milligan had worked for him as a laborer."

"Not quite," I said. "My guess is Sherry Fulton called her old man—maybe he called her, too. You could check his old bills and see what you find. The way I see it, I figure Fulton bribed the little princess with a trip to Hawaii, hoping in the meantime he could persuade Milligan to leave the picture."

"But he didn't know where Milligan and his daughter were living, that I do believe. That is until their former landlord gladly hands out the new address, thinking he's sending trouble Milligan's way. The funny thing is, I don't think Fulton had murder on his mind when he drove over there."

"It's just a hunch, but those

kinds of guys get too much done by buying people off. Maybe Milligan wanted more than Fulton offered—who knows? Whatever, it's obvious they couldn't agree. I figure they struggled, and that's when Milligan winds up dead."

Al Brewster was trying hard to put it together. "You're saying Alexander Fulton killed Rick Milligan? But Fulton's the one who hired you."

"Sure—perfect cover. It even fooled me. Who's going to suspect the guy who's hired you, especially when he's so broken up about his missing daughter. But little by little there were too many holes. First the phone number on Milligan's bill. Then a dirty Rolls Royce, that maybe got dirty at a construction site, or maybe got dirty from a long drive up a dirt road in Topanga.

"And then the fact that every time we talk, Fulton's more interested in who you guys think killed Milligan than in where his daughter is. But it wasn't until I saw his check at World Wide that I put it all together. Anyway, Al, that's what I've

got. It's your job to get it out of Fulton.

"Now I'm going to stop at the bank. There are a couple of checks with little highrise buildings on them I want to cash before it's too late."

The next day, I was reading the morning paper in my office, sipping on some dreadful instant coffee, trying to wake up. News travels fast in L.A. Alexander Fulton confessing to the homicide of Rick Milligan made the front page. It was pretty much as I thought, only Fulton claimed Milligan attacked him. I'm sure some high-priced lawyer will get him off.

Before I had a chance to flip to the Sport's section and check out the Dodger-Reds box score, the phone rang. Some squeaky voice was on the other end.

"Mr. Sidney Brassler?"

"Yeah, this is Sid, what can I do for you?"

"No Mr. Brassler, it's what we can do for you. This is Trans Pacific Airlines, and we've finally located your bag. You can pick it up at the airport anytime before nine p.m. Isn't that good news?"



THE LAST TO KNOW

The lady had powerful motivation for murder—but the murder had already been committed.

by HELENE

JUAREZ PHIPPS



THE SHERIFF'S CAR cruised around the plaza, then moved slowly down the side street past the cantina.

From her seat at the bar, she said, "They're still looking for him—the kid that killed his sister." She pushed her empty glass towards the bartender.

Beyond the window above the jukebox the dark patrol car turned into the alley. She watched until it was out of sight, said, "You think they'll catch him?"

The bartender shrugged. He picked up the glass, rinsed it, then dipped the rim in a saucer filled with coarse-grained salt. He shook the excess crystals from the edge of

the glass and set it down before her, said, "If I was the sheriff, I'd let him go."

He stirred up another drink and stared at the long line of unoccupied barstools. "You didn't know your husband and the girl . . ."

"I know it now," she said. "Everyone else knew it all these months. But I didn't know it till this morning. I had to wait till she was killed to find out. When they told me this kid killed his sister because she was sleeping with my husband, I wanted to die."

"People make me sick," he said. "They like to stick their noses into everyone's business."

"I should have known. I might have suspected something, but, you know . . ." Her dark eyes clouded. "Where did they find her?"

"In the fields near the commune."

"Was she dead?"

"Very dead. The kid blasted her seven times."

"He wasn't old enough to know how to shoot. Once would have done it."

"I guess he wanted to make sure he killed her. He had to punish his sister for what she did. They were a good Spanish family, one of the old ones around here. He was a good boy, went to church every Sunday, communion, confession,

everything. He thought he was doing right. You can't blame him for what he did."

She took a long swallow of her drink. "I don't blame him," she said. "It couldn't have happened to a more deserving . . ."

"Let it go. She's gone. She can't do any more harm."

"Can't she? Do you think this is going to make us forget her? Now we'll have one more under the bedcovers between us—like living with a ghost." She settled back and sipped the last of the margarita, said, "Leave the salt off the next one."

He hesitated before refilling the empty glass. "Don't you think you ought to be home?" with him?"

"You think he'll be crying because his girlfriend's gone? You think I should dry his tears?" She made angry circles on the dampened counter top with the bottom of the empty glass. "He didn't want me when she was alive. You know that. Why should he need me now?"

"You can never tell. It wouldn't hurt to try."

"It would hurt. You don't know how much it would hurt. Where is the girl now?"

"In the mortuary, next to the chapel. They're going to keep the coffin closed so no one can see what he did to her face."

She watched impassively as the bartender looked away,

said, "How does the sheriff know the kid killed her?"

"Who else? The father was too old. It was up to some man in the family to show her she did wrong. He had to shoot her to save face for all of them. It was in their code."

"I was brought up that way too." She closed her eyes. "How old was she?"

"About eighteen." He picked up an oiled rag and began polishing the bar top in a burst of energy. "She had a whole life ahead."

"Some life! Who with? He was old enough to be her father. My old man...he's almost too old for me."

"You know what I'm going to do. I'm going to look for that kid and find him before the cops get him. I'm going to go right up and give him an *abrazo*, a great big hug for the favor he's done for all of us. Then, I'm going to see that he gets away."

He nodded somberly. "Sure, sure. I know just how you feel."

"I only wish he'd done it sooner."

The cantina was getting dark inside with the blueness of the dying afternoon. The bartender took down a tin lantern from the shelf where he kept the glasses. He set it over a candle in a metal holder on the corner of the bar. "Haven't you had

enough. You've been here since noon."

He put her empty glass in the container with the dirty dishes. He set out more candles, fitting them with tin lantern hoods. "It's getting late," he said. "Why don't you go on home?"

He lit the first of the candles nearest him.

She watched the flames flare up, then steady under the perforated metal shields. "All right, I'll go," she said. She set one foot down carefully and the other.

Then she turned and braced herself against the raised edge of the bar, facing him. "That girl was young, maybe she was even innocent like I was once. Do you think it was my fault? Maybe my old man needed to feel young again?"

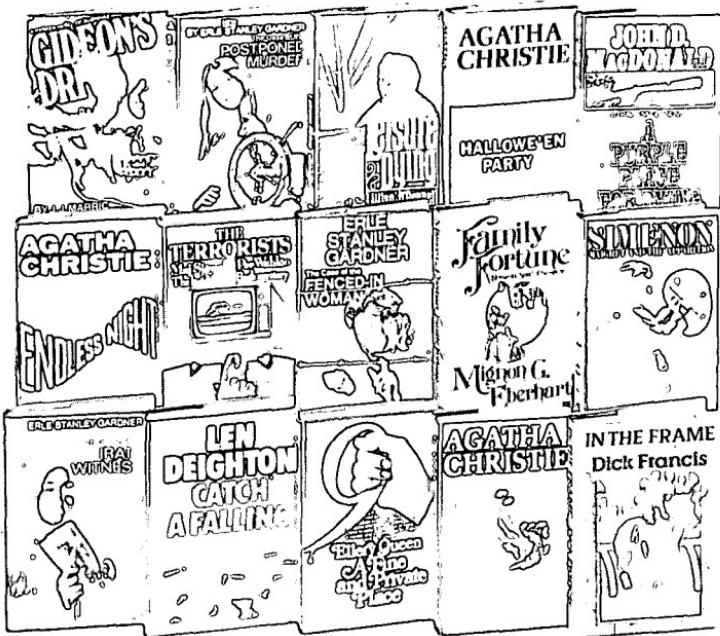
She started towards the door and put both hands out to push it open. "They'll never find that kid. He'll get away. You'll see." She began to shiver convulsively as though assaulted by a cold wind.

Strange how the pain remained. The muscles in her arm and shoulder still ached from the recoil. Seven times! She bit down on her lip that still tasted of salt. All the margaritas in the world could not rid her of the bitter aftertaste of gunpowder.

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